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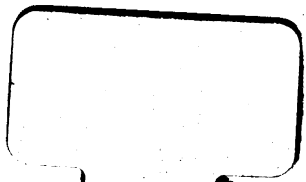

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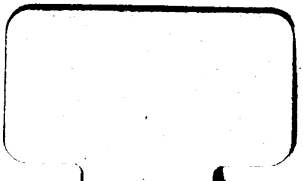

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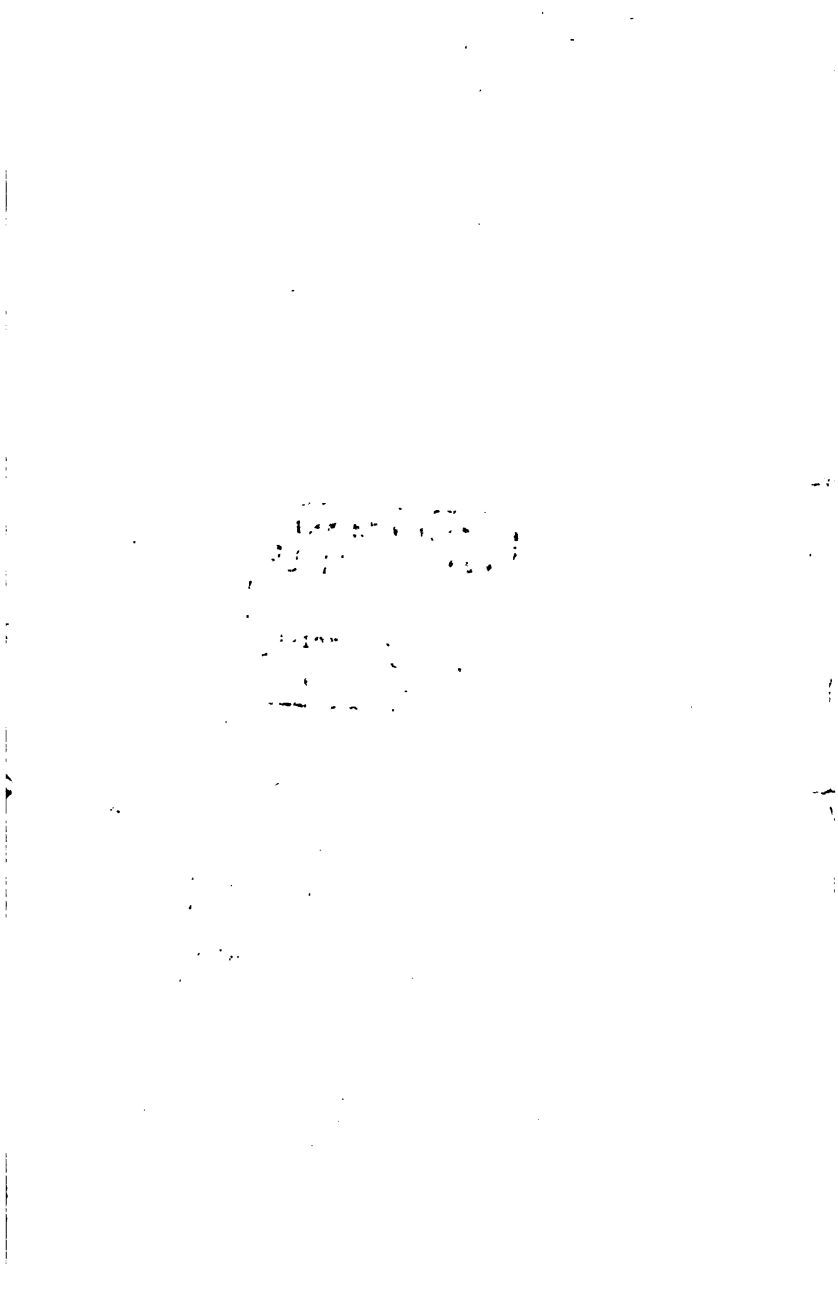

"PATRICIA, I'M ASKING YOU TO GIVE UP PLAYING MAID TO THIS CHARITY CHILD," HE SAID IMPATIENTLY.

MISS PAT'S GREAT IDEA

BY
PEMBERTON GINTHER

FRONTISPIECE BY
THE AUTHOR

PHILADELPHIA
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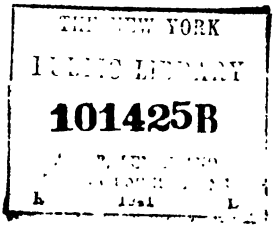

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To
My Good Friend Mrs. Morgan
With Warm Regards

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MAR 11 1940

Miss Pat's Great Idea

CHAPTER I

AN IDEA AND AN ELECTION

"I'M sure I should never have thought of it entirely on my own hook," said Patricia earnestly. "Something you said to me that first afternoon in Mrs. Nat's garden stuck in my mind—far down below the surface—and they've been gradually working up seventeen-year locusts, till they're simply sizzling to fly." She laughed and then added quickly, "That is, of course, if it really could be done."

Penelope turned her vivid blue eyes calmly upon her. "I think," she said, with her pink lips curving in an indulgent smile, "that it might be more possible for me to give an opinion on the matter if you could bring yourself to explain just what this new

idea of yours is. I don't seem to recall anything I said at our first meeting that might lead to great events."

Patricia flashed a swift glance at her to make sure that she was really sympathetic, and then she went on still more earnestly:

"Of course you don't remember, after all that's happened since then," she said. "We've all been so busy, first with the rush of war work and then getting settled back into regular harness, that it would be a miracle if you did remember. But I've not forgotten just exactly how you looked through your big spectacles at me when you said it: 'I consider opera a high art misapplied. I would have operas sung on recreation wharves, oratorios given in the slums and high-class concerts held in common dance halls.' You were terribly in earnest about it, you know, and when you wound up by saying that you believed that the true use for music was to create souls in the vegetable growths of city communities, you made me feel very small and mean and selfish because I was looking forward to going into opera in the regular way."

Penelope's smile faded, but her vivid eyes were very kind as she looked full into Patricia's face. She halted on the orchard path and laid a hand on the other's arm. "I do recall saying that," she confessed, "and I shall not take it back now—particularly since you have found success and happiness in another line of endeavor. But what that opinion of mine has to do with your new idea, as you call it——"

"Just this," flashed Patricia. "You believe in that. You are sensible. You are reasonable—oh, the most reasonable person I know!—and I've simply got to talk it over with someone who won't laugh at me or turn up their noses at me for a presumptuous goose. I want to make all that come true—I want to sing operas on wharves and oratorios in the slums, and I want to bring my music to those horrid, unattractive, stupid, dirty, unsatisfied creatures who get only the dregs of music in their cheap, nasty dance halls!"

She broke off, for she knew her voice was ...ing to tremble and she would not Penelope think her too impetuous for

such an undertaking. She had moved forward as she began to speak and now walked briskly with her bright head in its brown velvet "tam" held high. Penelope's silence stung her, but, strange to say, it did not shake her conviction. Instead, it brought a whole new array of reasons for persisting—reasons which it was not in her nature to withhold.

"I've been thinking about it ever since Bruce came back for those sketches along the wharves in Point Newton," she went on, dropping back again beside the thoughtful Penelope. "He said that there were crowds of the toughest sort of children, both boys and girls, all about the wharves, and that at noon the streets were alive with the young mill-workers who were absolutely the roughest lot he had ever seen, even in large cities. And Point Newton is such a ghastly place—one stuffy moving picture and a rickety dance hall on the edge of the woods by the canal—not a single comfortable attractive spot in the whole town where any fun is going on. It seems made on purpose for my sort of work. I could get

some people together and we could rent the large hall—it's pretty fair—and with some sort of scenery and some decorations—I could borrow tons from Bruce and perhaps some costumes, too—and with a light opera, say, 'Martha' or 'Erminie,' prettily staged, and perhaps a little reception afterward with some very simple refreshments, it seemed to me that the thing ought to be a perfectly sure-and-certain success."

Penelope slipped her arm within Patricia's and methodically got into step. She was still quite silent, but she was nodding her head in a serious way that was very comfortable to the eager Patricia.

"Constance will be back next week, you know," Patricia went on. "Her aunt has taken up all Constance's 'odds and ends,' as she calls them, and she's got so used to playing ministering angel to those poor souls that she's going to keep it up right along. And that lets Constance out, you see. She's coming here for a regular round of visits, and she's good for almost anything that needs brains and grit. She'll be one of us, I am sure. And Miriam Halden always

joins the team, no matter what it's up to. Elinor of course can't do much, having the baby and being obliged to spend so much of the winter in town with Bruce, but she'll help. And I shall get everyone I know to do or give something—Tancredi and Miss Lynch, Miss Tarleton and the Longs, and—but for goodness' sake, do say something, Penelope! After all, it's your idea. What have you got to say about it? Is it silly or is it sensible—inspiration or idiocy?"

Penelope drew her straight brows together, looking through narrowed lids at the golden September distance. "No," she replied very slowly, "it doesn't sound like idiocy to me. Considering your glorious voice and all the hard work you are doing, it sounds like—like something very different. The only question in my mind is, how are you going to manage all this—for it will take much time you know—before you go back to town in November?"

"Oh, didn't you know?" Patricia's surprise changed in a swift moment of recollection. "Of course, you didn't, for we only decided yesterday afternoon. I am going

to stay here with Judy—she's finishing at Miss Irving's, you know—and Bruce will bring Elinor and the baby home for Christmas and for the rest of the year, I hope. I am keeping up with good old Tancredi, going in only once a week, though, and I'll go on with some concert work among people I know, but I'm going to take a sort of half-holiday with Judy—not to mention Hannah Ann," she added with a laugh.

"And how about the singers?" persisted the other in her methodical way. "How can you get together enough people with voices to fill the rôles of even a small opera?"

Patricia dimpled. "That's my secret just now," she returned gayly. "But I've a perfectly good scheme for the principals. And I thought we might possibly get the chorus from the Club or Social House, or even from the slums themselves. The main and only thing I want just this minute is your valued opinion on the scheme as a whole. Does it appeal?"

Penelope nodded slowly. "It does," she replied with conviction. "Yes, it certainly does. I shall offer my services if——"

"Miss Pat! Miss Pat! Oh, *Miss Pat!*"

It was Judith's voice and it came from behind them. Patricia swung about to see her younger sister hurrying up the orchard hill in pursuit of them and her hands were waving something small and white at them. Patricia laughed, halting to watch Judith as she same swiftly up the sunny hillside.

"Dear old Ju always gets excited about letters," she said with loving tolerance. "She's never gotten over her belief the mail-bag is the most exciting thing in life."

Penelope halted, too, and they stood waiting for Judith, while the warm September air brought dry, sweet odors eddying about them, and the flicker of the golden September sunshine played upon them lovingly. It danced on Patricia's golden wisps of wind-blown hair and glinted in the gray watching eyes; it touched Penelope's smooth cheek and on the tip of her correct little nose; and it ran down the narrow-worn pathway to meet the slender young figure coming so lightly through the gnarled shadows of the old apple trees, showing it off against a glowing background

of yellowing grasses, gray-green foliage and radiant sky.

Judith had changed so little in the long months of Penelope's absence in France that she had at first sight seemed quite the same little girl of the days of Miss Pat's first concert tour under the auspices of the celebrated Mr. Tavish—the same little girl with slightly longer frocks and another way of doing her hair. But now, as Penelope watched her coming through the sun and shadow of the orchard hill, she saw a new Judith altogether.

"How old is Judith?" she asked rather abruptly.

Patricia started. "Ju? Seventeen last month," she answered promptly. "She's grown up scandalously fast, hasn't she? Makes me feel a regular grandmother. But she always was rather grown up, even in rompers, weren't you, Judy darling?" she added as her sister reached them. "Her only weaknesses were experiments and mail matter."

Judith, rosy with haste, tossed her pale locks in quite the old manner and her

voice had the old reproachful ring as she held out a bunch of letters, but to both of the older girls it was the young lady Judith who spoke: "Jim North brought them out from town for you, Miss Pat," she said, with a significant note in her smooth, clear tones. "He got them from Bruce at the studio and brought them directly over. I told him that it was extremely kind and that you would appreciate it greatly. He will stop back on his way home to find out what time you want him to be ready tonight."

Patricia giggled, at which Judith flushed but did not flinch. She handed over the three letters which she had brought and then turned to Penelope with an elaborately composed air. "Miss Pat forgot to telephone to Mrs. Halden about the lists for the meeting and I had to stop behind to attend to it," she remarked loftily. "I suppose we really ought to hurry, if we're not going to be late."

It was remarkable how clearly she conveyed the conviction that Patricia was a scatterbrained creature who needed careful

brooding over, particularly in the direction of the appreciation of Mr. James North's fine qualities. If she had been Patricia's mother or great-aunt she could not have done better.

Patricia giggled again, but said nothing. She dropped behind to open her mail, following absently with her eyes on the sheets and not breaking silence as they went down through the little lane and out on the pike, across the open space by the church, and into the shady road to Social House. It was not until Judith's hand was upon the gate-latch that she spoke, stuffing the letters into her pocket as she joined the others.

"You were on the right side with your hurrah for the mail this time, Judy machree," she said cheerfully. "One of the notes is from Madame Milano and she's going to be in town on the twentieth with Miss Tarleton—dinner at the studio with Elinor and Bruce—that's another note from Elinor, and we're to go in over night. The other joyful news is from Constance, who'll be here tomorrow for sure. Her aunt——"

She stopped abruptly on the first stone of the walk and stared at Penelope with widening eyes. "Madame Milano, you see!" she exclaimed with conviction. "*And* Constance arriving a whole fortnight ahead of schedule: that means something. That is a sign from the skies. The great Idea is taking shape already!"

Penelope smiled, but Judith was frankly perplexed. At the first suggestion of mystery she dropped her grown-upness and became entirely the old serious chum. "The great Idea—what is that?" she asked with even a tinge of respect in her voice. "Oh, Miss Pat dear, don't keep me out of it, no matter what it is. I promise——"

Patricia patted her slim shoulder affectionately. "Don't fret, my child," she returned; "you simply can't get out of it if you begged and prayed to be released. We need you badly and we shan't let you go. But now, there's this meeting of this committee to be got through with and I shan't breathe another word on the matter until we are through with the Orphans' Home problems. Mrs. Nat would never forgive

me if I kept two of her members hobnobbing on the door step while the meeting waited. Come, in with you and to work on the Orphans!"

Through the open doorway they were quite visible to the group in the yellow-and-black room, and Mrs. Nat's voice was welcoming them before they had crossed the big room. She was wearing her favorite blue again, having put off her mourning for her husband during the anxious days of that June when the fate of the Allies seemed to hang in the balance, and when, according to her brave philosophy, private sorrows should be sunk before the world-wide supreme need. Mrs. Halden was next her and the circle included Doris Long, Ruth Todd and Mrs. Hand, together with half a dozen others, all intent on the problems of the management of the Orphans' Home in Merton Row, halfway between Rockingham and Hilltown, and belonging partly to the lower and to the middle township on account of its location.

"Come along in and make a majority this minute," commanded Mrs. Nat with

her slightly husky chuckle. "We've been sticking between Mrs. Sally Dunford and the schoolmaster's wife from Tower Hill for the last fifteen minutes, and we can't for the life of us make up our minds which is the better woman for the place. Mrs. Long, will you kindly read the letters of recommendation again? Then we'll discuss them again before we take the vote."

Patricia slipped into a chair next Mrs. Halden and while she listened to the reading of the letters of the two candidates for the position of superintendent of the Orphans' Home, she was busily constructing her plea to Madame Milano which she decided should be made privately and not at the studio dinner with Bruce and Elinor in town. Her plans were all very confused as yet, but she felt positive that, with proper support and advice, her efforts would meet with success. "I don't know exactly what I'm expecting from her," she thought with a pleasant little shiver of hope, "but I *know* that she will be on the right side. She always is."

She roused herself then to the matter in

hand, for Doris Long had finished the recommendations for Mrs. Sally Dunford and had begun on those of her rival, Mrs. John Kirk, and a phrase in the first letter caught her whole attention. It described Mrs. Kirk as a "good manager, though very friendly toward children." She liked the picture it brought to her mind, and particularly because, opposed to it, she had a definite picture of Mrs. Sally Dunford as the capable, unflinching disciplinarian of a family of eight nearly grown children.

Impetuously she leaned toward Mrs. Halden and whispered, "Those Dunfords are awfully well-kept as to their bodies, but they've simply no imaginations at all. Don't you think Mrs. Kirk sounds good for our orphans—sort of mellow and comfortable? And if she's a good manager——"

Mrs. Halden nodded, and when the last letter had been read she rose to open the discussion, taking Patricia's words as her text. "Someone has said to me," she began in her pleasant voice, looking at each in turn with friendly eyes, "that our orphans are in need of a caretaker not only of their

bodies but also of their imaginations. And that appeals to me as a very practical suggestion, for I have found, as the mother of four active children, that the state of mind in children has a great effect on their physical condition. I believe thoroughly in warming and stimulating their minds and, while I recognize all of Mrs. Dunford's qualities as a manager, I find upon second thought that Mrs. Kirk appeals more strongly to me for the position in our Home."

As she sat down, one of the women from the lower township rose with a rustle. She breathed hurriedly and spoke with clear emphatic tones, bowing ceremoniously to Mrs. Nat as chairman. She deplored, she said, the turn taken by the committee. Orphans were not to be classed with children of prosperous parents; they were, in fact, totally different in mind and body and should be so considered. Proper lodging, nourishing food and certain educational advantages were offered them at the Home. More than that they did not and could not demand.

"As to imagination," she ended with a friendly though tolerant look at Mrs. Halden, "they surely need nothing in that line more than they already are equipped with. Anyone familiar with the records for the past four weeks can hardly doubt that imagination is lacking—the accounts of the escapades of those two Irish twins proves that, I think. No, Mrs. Chairman," she ended, bowing again to Mrs. Nat. "It is not imagination that we need, but the firm hand over those poor perverted minds. We have received them from the gutters and alleys, we have saved them from starvation and perhaps death—what we need for the place is a woman of character, a woman of experience, and I heartily recommend Mrs. Dunford, the mother of eight children, all in positions of responsibility in our community."

Patricia was on her feet before she knew it. "Oh, Mrs. Sears, you can't know how children feel about those things!" she cried impulsively. "You can't understand unless you've been among them. I have seen it at the Home—the Cripples' Home—and I

assure you that they are just as hungry for love as they are for bread and butter. I don't know Mrs. Kirk, but if she is friendly to children, she is sure to be more successful in the end than the most capable person in the world who is only capable and nothing more. I want to vote for Mrs. Kirk and I hope she will be elected."

Perhaps if Patricia had spoken less warmly, or if she had been less abrupt, she might have made a better impression on the opposition party. It was evident that she had not managed her appeal well, in spite of her great earnestness, for a storm of discussion rose immediately. The four matrons from the lower end rose in turn to defend their leader and their arguments had much sound sense in them. Mrs. Kirk had not been tested in this line of work, she had no intimate recent knowledge of children, having lost her two little girls in the epidemic four years ago; furthermore, she was known to be very fond of music—this in an explanatory tone with a glance toward Patricia as though accounting for partisanship in that direction.

"We feel," ended Mrs. Boggs with a reasonable air, "that, while Mrs. Kirk *may* be a success, there cannot be a shadow of doubt about Mrs. Dunford. She has already made good, in her home and in her position as housekeeper at the Rectory. I am for the assured success as against the merely probable. I join Mrs. Sears, Mrs. Finch, Mrs. Doran and Mrs. Ford in favor of Mrs. Dunford."

There was no use of Penelope's rising to defend the schoolmaster's wife. She was too much a stranger after her long absence and, beside, everyone knew that her knowledge of children was purely theoretical. The few earnest words she said did more to strengthen the opposition than Mrs. Halden's good nature. "Well, after all, Mrs. Dunford *is* a reliable woman," and the voting proceeded without more discussion, while Patricia inwardly fumed and Judith, who was merely a spectator, slipped out into the other room, and sat down in state waiting the end.

Mrs. Dunford was elected, in spite of Patricia's inward fuming, for at the moment

Mrs. Hand, who had been hesitating, took encouragement from Mrs. Halden's amiable words and cast her vote with the influential Mrs. Sears. She looked very much as though she would have liked to take it back when she heard Mrs. Halden's vote for the kindly Mrs. Kirk, but the support of Ruth Todd, who had voted for Alma Dunford's sake, helped her greatly.

"My dear, I wish we might have two superintendents," she said to Patricia when the meeting was adjourned and tea was being served by a very straight-lipped young lady, Judith and Marie Sears. "I feel exactly as you do about developing the soul and all that, but I suppose that might come later—at all events, we have our superintendent and that much is accomplished."

She smiled vaguely and wandered off to Mrs. Halden, and Patricia, in her amusement at Mrs. Hand's attempts to be of all parties, found her good nature again and began to enjoy herself. Mrs. Nat's hearty, "Well, my dear, we could have done worse, you know, Sally is a born manager,"

helped greatly and by the time the tea had been disposed of and farewells were being said, she was her buoyant self again and had begun to think of her own concerns. The great Idea was again rising on her horizon as she halted Mrs. Halden in the big room and put her questions.

"Miriam will be ready early tonight," that lady replied. "She told me that Miss Lynch would be out with her to dinner, and that's off our mind—accompanists are half the concert, I believe. Mr. Sinclair will come about ten and speak for five minutes—he thinks that's enough to interest people who have already paid well for their tickets. Bert Nelson offered to bring the second violin—what's his name?—from Pelham. So everything is in good shape. Don't tire yourself, my dear," she added. "Remember you are our special attraction. Better go have a nap before dinner."

Patricia promised readily enough and meant to keep her word, but she lingered for another cup of tea and then for a chat with Mrs. Nat and Doris Long and finally waited for another ten minutes while Mrs.

Sears carried off Marie and Mrs. Finch in her large motor, and Mrs. Doran sought, found and disappeared with Ruth Todd, leaving only Doris, Mrs. Nat and a distant, patient Judith in the cozy yellow-and-black room among the cushions and growing candlelight. And then it was absolutely too pleasant to budge.

"You may run along home, Ju, if you're in a hurry," she called to the waiting figure by the window. "I'll walk over with Mrs. Nat." She said it very cheerfully, for she knew of what she was going to speak while she walked with her good friend.

Judith rose promptly. "It's getting quite dark," she said somewhat indifferently. "I believe I will go. I promised to see Martie after tea."

She took up her scarf and moved lightly across the lighted spaces, smiled back at them from the door and then faded into the deepening twilight of the big room. The door clicked behind her, and Doris Long rose.

"It surely is time for me to leave, too," she began, when a curious sound from the front door made her halt.

Patricia and Mrs. Nat half rose in their chairs. They all listened, but nothing was to be heard except the usual sounds of the place and hour. Doris smiled at them as they sank back in the cushions.

"Imagination," she said, tossing the word to Patricia. "Just the sort your orphans don't need——"

But she got no further, for the front door was flung violently open and Judith's outlines, strangely distorted by some bundle or wrap about her arms or shoulders, filled the dim space for a moment and then swiftly merged into the shadows again as she came hurriedly through the big room toward their candle-lighted corner.

"Judith, what is it?" cried Patricia and Mrs. Nat in a breath.

They were on their feet in an instant, but Judith reached the doorway before they could move further. Her face was shining with excitement and she carried something heavy in her arms.

"Look!" she cried, holding out her burden to them. "Oh, look! It was on the step and I almost walked into it! Oh, Patricia, Mrs. Nat, do, *do* look!"

CHAPTER II

MISS PAT PROMISES

ALL three took a step forward together. All three stared at the bundle Judith held. Patricia found utterance first, but it sounded almost like one voice as they cried,

"A BABY!"

And that is what it was. Or, if not quite a baby, at least a small, a very small girl wrapped in a warm dark shawl of ancient plaid and pinned so securely into place with large shining safety-pins that she could move neither hands nor feet. Her small serious face looked out at them with questioning eyes, but she neither wept nor smiled. It was plain that she was used to odd situations in life.

Patricia seized her in a twinkling, but it was on Mrs. Nat's lap that the little waif landed while Judith went over her meager account of how she had stumbled on the

bundle on the step. There was not much to tell.

"There wasn't a soul in sight, though I looked everywhere, thinking that if it were really a baby I ought to find the horrid mother and make her take it back," explained Judith rather breathlessly. "I went all around the house on tiptoe like a flash and I looked behind the trees, but there was no one. So I came in."

They looked at one another again and then Patricia had an idea. "Perhaps it isn't a castaway after all," she suggested hopefully. "Perhaps its nurse or little sister has merely mislaid it on the step while she went an errand for——"

Judith's look was silencing, but Mrs. Nat's words were convincing. "This child doesn't belong to a soul in this neighborhood, my dears," she announced after her careful scrutiny of the little face and covering plaids. "It's my opinion that it has been left here because whoever had it wanted it to get into the Orphanage without fuss, and they thought that the Committee would be a more likely chance than the

Matron of the Home itself. I suppose they must have known there were no vacancies there."

"But why should they have been so late?" questioned Patricia. "If they'd really wanted to have the baby taken into the Home, they ought to have been here while the Committee was here. I can't think it's a foundling——"

"They must have been delayed, missed a train or something like that," argued Doris. "It's quite probable——"

"But it was put there on purpose and not mislaid, as you say, Miss Pat," persisted Judith. "It's an orphan, I'm perfectly sure and——"

Mrs. Nat cut the discussion. She undid the first safety-pin. "There!" she exclaimed. "As I thought!"

A small stiff card with some printed lettering on it fluttered to the floor.

Patricia and Doris stooped for it, bumping heads without even feeling the jar of contact. Doris had it, but she handed it to Judith, who had not moved but whose eyes were alight and whose cheeks were

flaming. "Read it, Judy dear," she said in a flutter of excitement. "You bagged the little one and you have first place."

Judith took the card, moving nearer so that all could see the large straggling letters, and they all read together, though Judith's voice articulated the words: "HER NAME IS FELICE. Her PARENTS WAS alright. She takes after HER MOTHER. SHE WAS A BEUTIE. Be good to her." In the corner: "18 mos. today."

There was a little silence and then Mrs. Nat said, "That's settled, it seems. Now for getting acquainted. Here, Judith, hold these pins while I peel Miss Felice. We'll have a look at her before we hand her over to the Home—we may as well make sure that she's all here. The way she's pinned up makes me feel she must be in little pieces."

The baby submitted quietly to the handling that was involved in removing the large shining pins and when the heavy wrap was removed she stretched out her hands to the twinkling candles.

"Pitty," she said very clearly.

It was a distinct shock. Even Mrs. Nat started. Judith dropped the pins. Doris rippled with pleasure, but Patricia dropped on her knees before the small sedate figure and held out her hands, murmuring invitation.

But Felice was evidently unused to coaxing ways. She stared at Patricia's golden hair and at her flushed lovely face and again she solemnly stretched out one small hand and spoke, even more emphatically.

"Pitty, pitty, *pitty!*" she announced emphatically.

There was a peal of approving laughter, while Patricia buried her face in the baby's neck in a shower of embarrassed kisses. She raised large eyes to the others as she sat back on her heels. "That child," she said, unconsciously using Mrs. Nat's phrase, "is clean—absolutely and perfectly clean! She couldn't be cleaner if she were Elinor's own baby."

"And so we may believe the writer of that note," declared Mrs. Nat briskly. "I never knew a careless, dirty person to

be entirely reliable, and it's a rule that often works both ways. We'll agree that this child's parents were all right, on the strength of her well-washed little body. I wish she'd been brought earlier, though, for she'll have to be disposed of promptly, if we're all to be ready for the concert tonight. She'll have to be taken to the Home for the night anyway. Doris, your car is here, isn't it?"

Doris began her offer to take the waif at once, but Patricia swept her aside with an eager gesture. "Oh, don't take her to the Home right straight away," she begged. "Do let's keep her and see if we can't get some regular parents for her. I'd hate to have her go among all that crowd of gingham-and-pigtails for good."

Judith voiced the surprise of all. "Miss Pat!" she cried, staring. "What in the world! Why shouldn't she go to the Home? She may be clean, but she's just the sort of baby that belongs in a Home. She's——"

"And that's the reason I want to keep her from it," flashed Patricia, to her own amazement. "I should hate to condemn

her to gingham and pigtails without having given her a chance. She's only a baby yet and we can make her into almost anything we choose. Let's give her the chance. Mrs. Nat, you see how it is, don't you?" she turned to her trusted friend. "The Home is full—we all know that—and she'll only be taken on sufferance and perhaps be shipped off to the next Orphanage tomorrow. Let's find her some regular people somewhere and give her a new start. She's not very attractive, but she seems to be good and quiet—surely there must be someone who would want her. I'll take her first and we might take turns until she is adopted."

Mrs. Nat's slightly bulging blue eyes twinkled. "My dear, you are going it quite strong, but I can't say I exactly disagree with your suggestions," she replied cheerfully. "The Home is full, as you say, and there may be people who would adopt her. More than that, there may be someone who can be found to claim her. We'll have to wait until we are quite sure she is quite entirely abandoned before we can

do anything very definite. In the meanwhile, however, there will be no harm in taking charge of the little thing. I think that I should be the first to have her, since your concert——"

It was Judith who interrupted this time. "Oh, Mrs. Nat, I'll see to her if Miss Pat is busy tonight, really I will," she volunteered eagerly. "I know lots about babies since Elinor's Louise came. And this one is almost a grown-up baby. We'll manage splendidly—really we will."

"Do let us have her, Mrs. Nat," added Patricia. "We'll report in the morning and you can take her away if she's being ill-treated."

Mrs. Nat reached out for the shawl which she had dropped in the nearest chair. "Until tomorrow then," she decided. "We haven't time or breath to waste now. Here, Judith, bring my bag out to the car. Doris will drop you at Greycroft and then take me on to the Rectory. Tell Hannah Ann that this is none of my doings, though," she added, as she led the way with the quiet little bundle in her strong arms. "Tell her,"

she continued as she settled herself on the front seat beside Doris, "that she's not to let herself be imposed upon by you two harum-scarum things. Tell her," she finally cautioned, as she lifted the quiet bundle over the door of the car and into Patricia's waiting arms, "that I'll drop in the first thing in the morning to see her about this affair. And tell her," she called back, as the car began to move off toward the Rectory, "to send you off in time tonight, baby or no baby!"

Patricia and Judith stood for a fleeting moment, as the red light vanished around the corner, and then they turned and went carefully up the terrace steps, Patricia carrying the baby and Judith following with Mrs. Nat's bag, which she had quite forgotten to give up to its owner. Both were rather occupied with the thought of Hannah Ann, and somehow the scheme did not appear so practical as it had at Social House.

Patricia halted on the portico, ostensibly to allow Judith to open the door for her, but really to collect herself before meeting Hannah Ann's severe eye. In spite of the

worship accorded her by the devoted guardian of Greycroft, in spite of her own success in her chosen work, Patricia had the same tremor at her heart as when she had sought the housekeeper to make confession as to the candy business or the boarders or the chicken project. Judith understood perfectly.

"You needn't be afraid," she said in a low tone as though fearful of being overheard. "She'll take anything from you, Miss Pat—*anything.*"

Patricia opened her lips, but, as on that long-ago day when the three sisters had come as strangers to the hospitable old house, the door opened abruptly, leaving out a stream of warm bright light, and Hannah Ann herself stood on the threshold, peering into the twilight.

"I heard the ottomobile," she said somewhat sternly, "and as it was well past dinner time, I didn't wait—what you got there?" she broke off to ask, staring at the bundle in Patricia's arms. "What——"

Patricia acted on a happy impulse. She put the bundle right into Hannah Ann's

amazed arms, saying as she slipped an arm about Hannah Ann, Felice and all, "You do make such good milk-toast, Hannah Ann dear, that I brought this little thing over for some of it. Would it be too much trouble to get her some, or are you too busy?"

Hannah Ann without reply marched into the brightly lighted library and carefully set the quiet baby down in the great soft chair by the hearth. She stooped to examine Felice, her hair, her dress and wrap; then she turned on Patricia. "Tell me what this means," she commanded. "This ain't anyone we know. Where did it come from?"

"Oh, you musn't call her 'it,'" protested Patricia. "Her name's Felice, she's eighteen months old today, and Mrs. Nat agreed ——"

"Let me tell her," broke in Judith. "Listen, Hannah Ann," and she began a brief, accurate account of Felice's introduction to the more select circles of Rockingham, dwelling strongly on Mrs. Nat's approval of Patricia's suggestion and skip-

ping lightly over the question of the length of Felice's visit to Greycroft. She felt she had spoken well when Hannah Ann nodded grimly and turned again to the docile little figure in the big chair.

"Well, it's too late to complain, I guess," she said, stooping to lift the bundle again. "But as for milk-toast—well, I can take care of *that*, I wager."

She almost dropped the bundle again when Felice suddenly put out a tiny hand to touch her hard cheek and said very clearly, "Nan-na."

Hannah Ann gripped the little body, flushed and frowned. "How in the nation did she know my name?" she demanded, but it was clear that she was immensely pleased.

She stalked straight out toward the back precincts, throwing a warning over her shoulder, "Dinner's ready and the telephone's ringin' and that Mr. Jim has been here twice since you went out," and then she disappeared and was seen no more until the two girls had made their hasty dinner, answering various calls on the

telephone between bites, and had rushed upstairs to get ready for the evening's enjoyment.

Patricia paused on the landing, listening to some sounds from above, and then she turned to Judith, motioning significantly aloft toward the third floor. "She's up in her room and she's got the baby there," she whispered triumphantly. "Let's go and beard her in her den—just for a moment."

Judith glanced at the clock, but the temptation was too great. "Let's," she agreed.

They tiptoed upstairs and crept to the half-opened door of Hannah Ann's immaculate room, where a bright light burned and the regular tramp of Hannah Ann's hard heels came rhythmically. Patricia had not the heart to spy upon her old friend and she tapped softly, pushing open the door as the steps halted and Hannah Ann's voice, very low and impatient, bade her come in.

It amazed Patricia that Hannah Ann should not seem at all disturbed at being found with the sleepy baby in her arms, for

it was evident that it was merely impatience that gave the edge to her hushed voice, as she demanded sharply, "What's amiss now? Ain't your things all ready, or what? I can't come down this minute, but she'll be off in a jiffy if you'll clear out and give her a chance."

"We only came to say good-night to her," protested Patricia in a meek whisper, backing out and pushing Judith with her.

On the lower landing she clutched Judith in a sudden paroxysm of silent laughter. "Suppose, oh, suppose she turns out to be the fond parent we were to look for!" she cried under her breath. "Suppose she won't give Felice up tomorrow!"

Judith could see no humor in this turn of affairs. "Don't be afraid," she began emphatically, when a step in the hall below made them both start. It was Mrs. Nat, arrayed in her evening black lace, and she opened her eyes at the two figures above her on the stair.

"Aren't you ready yet, Miss Pat?" she asked in surprise. "Jim North's motor is coming up the road and——"

Patricia gave a little cry, turned to fly and then halted. "Come on up while I hop into my things," she urged. "I'll not be a minute. It isn't late, and anyway, Jim can always wait."

Mrs. Nat chuckled as she came up the broad stair. "I guess I'd best stop to see that you don't dawdle," she agreed. "I dropped in for that bag of mine and I may as well wait for Judith. I suppose Martie Sneath will be on time—that girl is always on the dot."

Judith whisked into her own room, calling back, as she fled, reassurances as to Martie's good intentions, and Patricia, hooking an arm in Mrs. Nat's, drew her into the violet chamber, where she was once again domesticated. "You see I'm all ready," she said, pointing to the array on the bed. "Frock, music, fan—everything in order. I got them together before I went out—that's a new rule that works well in any case. Sit down while I splash a bit and then I'll tell you all about the new baby."

She was back before Mrs. Nat had found her gloves among the contents of the bag

recovered on her way in, and she chattered volubly as she brushed out her shining hair, slipped into shimmering garments and arranged her music in perfect order for immediate use. Preparedness had come to be one of her characteristics in the busy two years just past and she was hardly conscious of her own neat efficiency. Beside, she was shaping in her mind the plea for her new Idea, which she very much wanted to present to her sagacious friend in the best way possible.

How she managed it she could not recall, but she did manage it before the music-roll was fastened, and her heart sang a little song of thanksgiving over Mrs. Nat's hearty yet critical approval. "Of course, I'll go slow, as you say," she replied, picking up her gloves. "And I shan't take any steps without consulting you, but—oh, bother, there's Henry again at that gong! I'll have to rush off. Kiss me, Mrs. Nat dear, and tell me I'm all right."

She fluttered back from the door to drop a kiss on her friend's cheek, and then paused a second on the threshold with the little pucker on her brow that asked approval.

"You're just right," declared Mrs. Nat heartily. "That frock is the exact thing. I'm glad you didn't wear the blue, after all."

The pucker smoothed from Patricia's brow and she flashed a smile at Judith, who came quietly up beside her. Her whole attention shifted to her sister and she swung about with a little cry, "Ju, you're a perfect duck tonight! Look at her, Mrs. Nat, isn't she too sw——"

"Mr. North is waiting, Miss Pat," interposed Judith calmly, but she stood for a moment in the doorway beside Patricia, with a little flush of pleasure on her slender face and a slight smile curving her delicate lips. Praise from those she loved was very dear to reticent Judith.

They made a pretty picture framed by the white doorway. Judith was in palest pink net, very simply made and well suited to her slender childishness; her pale hair shone like dead gold and her creamy skin had the luster of warm ivory. She would never be beautiful like Elinor, nor charming after Patricia's fashion, but she had a

quaint attractiveness all her own, a flavor of delicious remoteness, like some dream picture come true. She had the same deep, serious gaze and the same composed air as the little Judith of the old days, but one felt beneath that calm exterior a rich, flexible imagination, a steadfast joyousness of nature in sharp contrast to the frank, spontaneous, emotional older sister whom Judith worshipped so sincerely. Patricia was in her favorite white, with white flowers at her girdle and no color save the gold of her shining hair, the pink of her eager cheeks and the clear gray of her candid eyes. Mrs. Nat looked at them both.

"You'll do," she said with a wave of her hand. "Run along, Miss Pat; and, Judith, you'd best take your things down into the library. I hear Hannah Ann coming down and I want a word with her about our young visitor."

Patricia flung another kiss toward her smiling friend, patted Judith on the hand, and, catching up her wrap from the rail where she had flung it, she went swiftly

down the stair, humming a scrap of the first song she would sing at Halden's tonight. As her delicate slipper touched the lower stair, her mind underwent a complete change. She was no longer thinking of Ideas, or orphans, or Judy's charming grown-upness. She had dropped mechanically into the concert singer whose whole thought was for accompanist, music and punctuality.

She came into the drawing-room with a very business-like air. The immaculate young man who rose hurriedly at her entrance seemed rather quenched by her manner, as though he had encountered it before and recognized its force. He did not attempt to divert it.

"We've got ten good minutes yet," he said, taking the music-roll with automatic promptness. "There's time to go around by Mrs. Spicer's, if you're dead set on taking her along."

Patricia shook her golden head. "She's going with Judith—she's upstairs anyway," she responded absently. "I'd rather go on with you now. I promised I'd be early."

She stopped to tug at her gloves, and he waited very willingly, looking down upon her with a perturbed gaze.

He was tall and solid, with smooth dark hair and a strong nose and chin. His mouth showed a line that bespoke a certain amount of obstinacy, but his face as a whole was a pleasant face. The slight frown that creased his broad forehead did not appear to come from annoyance—it seemed rather the sign of some anxiety.

"I say, Miss Pat," he broke out suddenly, "I've something rather special to ask you. Can't you get your mind off music for a minute or two? I——"

He stopped at Patricia's inquiring, absent look, sighed, looked resigned and seemed to give up whatever matter had been in his thoughts. "Never mind, we'll have it out later," he said philosophically. "You'll be more human when you have those songs out of your system. Are you ready? We may as well be on our way, I suppose."

Patricia, with all her mind still on her music, nodded brightly. She had hardly heard what he was saying and his words

made no impression on her. She let him place her soft wrap about her shoulders, conduct her to the waiting limousine, snap the door shut upon them both and settle beside her in a comfortable silence before she roused herself to be even the tiniest bit agreeable. She was so used to Jim.

Ever since, on that unforgotten day, he had brought the wounded chum of Patricia's twin brother out to Greycroft to tell the story of that last triumphant charge at Château-Thierry where Ted had fallen so gloriously, Jim North had been part of the family life at Rockingham and in town. He had chummed with Bruce, admired Elinor, teased Judith, respected Hannah Ann, and, last and most of all, had constituted himself Miss Pat's constant and cheerful shadow. In all this he had his mother's earnest approval and, as his mother was Mrs. North of Wyndham Towers, her approval meant much to a young man who had no special business proclivities but many expensive tastes.

Patricia buttoned the last tiny button on her new embroidered gloves—a gift from

Penelope on her home-coming—and suddenly appeared to drop the concert-singer air. She sat forward, silencing a hopeful movement toward speech on Jim's part, and turning to look him earnestly in the face, as her custom was.

"Jim," she said, impressively, "I've something rather special to ask you. It'll only take a minute or two. Will you promise not to interrupt?"

She did not realize that she was using his own words of a few minutes before, nor catch the fleeting, startled look he cast on her—a look which swiftly changed to his usual good-natured reassuring glance.

"Fire away," he responded cheerfully. "We've about five minutes on the road. I'm listening."

Patricia thought he looked a bit disappointed at her opening speech, but she could not see very well in the dim interior of the car and she did not let it halt her eager words. They tumbled out very prettily, Jim thought, and she looked so bright, so sweet and happy in her enthusiasm that he paid rather scant attention to

the project of getting up a small opera company to give a few performances at Point Newton. When she stopped he encouraged her by promises of help and when she asked him to be quite secret about it until it should be more definitely established, he vowed with evident pleasure that he'd die rather than breathe a syllable. Altogether he was quite satisfactory.

Patricia beamed on him as the car came to a halt before the brilliantly lighted entrance to the Halden's hospitable home. "Remember, you're pledged," she said brightly, giving him her hand as she stepped out. "I'll rely on you."

"Absolutely," he replied with great earnestness and he pressed her hand firmly in token of their agreement.

Patricia ran up the low steps to the open door, well pleased with life and with Jim. "He's an awfully good sort," she thought gratefully, and she did not resent the clasp of her fingers as she might have done.

He was close behind her as she gained the threshold. "Don't forget that I'm to have my inning later," he said over her

shoulder as they went in. "I have something special, too."

Patricia nodded. "I'll remember," she replied, still with gratitude. "I'll have supper with you, you know."

And then she turned to Miriam Halden, who was hurrying toward them, followed by a blonde, correct young woman with some music in her hand. Miriam had grown taller and broader than in the old days, but she was still the same impetuous creature. She pounced on Patricia, dismissing Jim with a nod toward the upper precincts where the men's dressing-rooms were, and she halted her under the great standing lamp by the drawing-room door, slipping off the wrap with dextrous hands.

"My word, you're looking in great shape tonight, isn't she, Miss Lynch?" she cried. "You'll sing a lot of extra dollars out of those poor dupes who are coming. We've decided—we've just heard that Mr. Ives is coming—to have a bowl for further contributions. Come along now and tune up before the victims begin to arrive. It's after eight and Mother has gone over to the Big Room to be ready for them."

CHAPTER III

THE CONCERT AT THE HERMITAGE

" . . . one who is well-known to us—Miss Patricia Kendall—and her first song will be 'The Swan,' by Grieg."

Mr. Halden made way for Patricia amidst a great clapping of hands and a murmur of pleased expectancy. Chairs were moved slightly, heads were turned to watch her as she took her place beside the piano and Judith nudged her companion, whose dark vivid face was intent with interest and whose strong slender hands were making a vigorous point in the applause.

"She's feeling just right and she'll do wonderfully," she prophesied in a whisper. "See how Mr. Ives is clapping. He's never heard her yet—just wait."

Martie glanced at the stout old gentleman on the front row and showed her even white teeth in a swift smile. "I bet they'll turn themselves inside-out for her tonight,"

she agreed. "Lucky for me that I don't come till after supper, when they're all fed up and easy to please. I'd give my boots to play her accompaniments, though."

Judith repressed the regret that Martie's easy-going speeches gave her. "You never would play for her," she countered. "You told her so last year."

"Last year?" echoed Martie, settling the folds of her soft red gown. "Oh, last year was a different kettle of fish. But hush, she's going to begin. Jiminy, that Miss Lynch knows her business, though, doesn't she? She plays that introduction like—like I'd play it myself," and she gave a little chuckle that sounded very much like the Martie of the far-away unregenerate days when she was studio-girl, pupil and also sharer of Judith's many experiments.

Judith, glancing swiftly at her in her glowing soft gown with her dark hair done in the latest mode and her brilliant face alight with intelligent interest, gave a little sigh of resignation. She must be satisfied with the wonders already wrought in the daughter of Sneath, she knew, but it was

hard not to want to curb Martie's tendency to slangy speech, the only visible survival of the dead past. Perhaps it was respect for what lay in those strong slender fingers of Martie's that kept Judith's lips mute; perhaps it was the very real bond between the two very different natures; but whatever it was, she said nothing, turning her whole attention to the center of the room where was the grand piano, Miss Lynch and Patricia.

The rippling murmurs died, the melody began and Patricia took up the simple theme as simply and naturally as Grieg himself could have desired. She did not even glance at the score on Miss Lynch's music rack, but stood with one hand resting lightly on the great dark shining piano and her face lifted as though she saw the swan floating above the waves of sound that flowed and flooded about her. She was not a concert singer making an appeal for a worthy charity, but a happy, care-free girl watching the great white bird in a sky all her own.

Judith's cheeks flushed and the tears

sprang to her eyes—her pride in Patricia was sometimes almost a pain—and she noted with greedy eyes the silence of the room, the tense eagerness of the audience as the perfect, golden notes dropped on the fragrant air. The storm of applause had her entire approval.

"She could have been a great opera singer, as Madame Tancredi said," she said to Martie, whose palms were stinging with her efforts to express herself. "She acts every little song—see how she made you see the swan. Sometimes I wish she hadn't given it up. It almost seems as if she were wasted——"

Martie turned quickly. "You'll never make her see it that way now," she said decisively. "And look what she's done instead. Wasted! I wonder at you, Judith Kendall!"

The music for the next song was beginning and Judith took refuge in silence. She really had no answer to Martie's vigorous comment. She knew what Patricia had done in choosing the concert field and limiting that field to helpful opportunities.

She remembered the wheel-chair for old Mr. Tomes and the mortgage paid off Mrs. Jim Dorset's tiny cottage, the Music Fund for the Cripple's Home, the Milk Fund at the Settlement House in Hillside, and remembering that these were only a few of the benefits Patricia's voice had brought to the community, she felt that she had indeed been wrong in even hinting that opera might have been better.

"And look at me," exploded Martie at the end of the next burst of applause. "Who would have cared for my playing if it hadn't been for her? And then there's those evenings at Social House that she started, and those two girls of old Hawkins' she's paying for at the Training School. Wasted? Well, I guess not."

Mrs. Hand, who was directly in front of them, had caught the last of the defense. She turned, smiling her soft ingratiating smile, while her white gloved hands still gently clapped the retiring Patricia. "Ah, my dear Miss Martha," she said sweetly, "we all know what a beneficent power that dear young lady wields in this place. Miss

Patricia's protegés are too numerous to mention." She turned again to her companions on the same row, but she had given Martie a satisfactory phrase.

"Miss Pat's protegés," she repeated with relish. "I like that somehow. It sounds like one of your story titles, Judith. You'll have to make up something to go under that heading." She laughed a clear short laugh. "I'm in it, remember. Oh, there's the supper music and here's Mr. Bert Nelson and Johnnie Carr coming for us. Jiminy! it's fun to be raising money for orphans, isn't it, Ju?"

The musical invitation was sounding, as Martie had said, and the whole company, dissolving into little groups, made its way from the Big Room, where the concert was being held, across the covered passageway to the spacious dining-room of the Hermitage, that mis-named home of the easy-going Halden family.

Patricia in the group with old Mr. Ives, whose generous check the watchful Miriam had already secured, with Doris Long and a few others, was making a sort of triumphal

passage toward the house when Martie and Judith passed her. Her joy in the success of the affair was shining in her eyes and bubbling from her lips in soft laughter. She seemed in the gayest, kindest mood possible and Martie whispered to Judith as they entered the glowing supper-room:

"Miss Pat's got another protegé. She's annexed Mr. Ives, and his niece is getting in line for another," she laughed, turning to Johnnie Carr, who was anxiously looking about for some cozy nook for the quartette. "Did you hear the latest about the new society that's to be formed—Miss Pat's Protegés. Anyone needing advice, assistance or regeneration may apply."

Johnnie grinned absently, having his eye on a corner that was just right. But before he could marshal his company in that direction, the group, with Patricia in it, blocked his way, and Jim North dextrously led Patricia and Miss Ives into the coveted spot. "Thunder," murmured Johnnie under his breath and added aloud, "Come on over to the den, there's bound to be room there."

He led the way to the curtained alcove

just off the dining-room where the intimates of the family foregathered at times like this, and they found, as he predicted, room enough between Helen Halden's supper group and the door of the dining-room to settle themselves nicely for a jolly hour.

Patricia saw them pass and nodded gayly to them. She was thrilling with a sense of power, a sense of her own happy power to make others happy, and everything looked beautiful to her. She liked the kind old Mr. Ives; she liked his gentle, silent niece; she liked the decorations of the room, the food, the whole company; and particularly at that moment she liked the correct, agreeable James North, whose smooth dark head looked so well among the other heads and whose common sense appealed most strongly to her.

He had helped her greatly tonight, for he had brought Mr. Ives to her at once with his open check book, and he had marshaled his mother's friends without mercy —nice old ladies with fat bank accounts whose hearts were easily reached by charming young singers at perfectly conducted musicales. She was very grateful to Jim.

She looked up at him after the first part of the supper was over and the Ives' had moved to another side of the room, and she thought he looked most remarkably well. Suddenly she recalled her promise.

"What is the something special that I was to hear?" she asked gayly as he took the chair Miss Ives had just vacated. "I'm quite ready to listen now," and she smiled at him with all the friendliness in the world.

He glanced at her in a startled way, half rose and then sat down again. His face grew remarkably serious. "This isn't exactly the place I intended," he said determinedly, "but it might as well be here as anywhere. I've got to get it off my mind." He hesitated and then added quickly, "I just want you to marry me, Patricia."

It was such a surprise to Patricia that she had no words. She had known in a vague way that he cared for her and in a vague way had liked him to care for her, so long as it did not go further than that. But to hear it in plain words—"marry me, Patricia"—that took her breath.

"Why, J-Jim," she stammered turning rosy to her ear-tips, "it's so—so *sudden*."

He did not seem to be disconcerted by her surprise. He laid his empty plate calmly on the tray of a passing waiter and turned again to her with a new compelling tone in his voice.

"See here, Patricia," he said quietly, "we've been good pals for nearly two years ——"

"Eighteen months," murmured Patricia veraciously.

"Well, eighteen months, it's all the same," he rejoined. "I know what I think of you and you ought to have sized me up by this time. Do you hate to think of being engaged to me?"

Patricia drew a long breath, considering. "N-no," she decided, "I don't believe I should."

He in his turn drew a long breath, a breath of relief. "Then it's a go," he declared conclusively. "We're engaged. And I'll have the ring next week. Shall you like a hoop of diamonds or do you want some other stones?"

Patricia could only gasp. She had no protest for this swift disposal of herself and

her future. Jim had been too long a part of her familiar circle for this sudden authoritative act of his to rouse resentment in her. She felt that she liked him quite as much as ever as he made his announcement. It all seemed part of the happy scene, the gay supper party, the lights and the fragrance. She did not look ahead to see herself Mrs. James North of Wyndham Towers—that picture did not even present itself then; she merely saw Jim in his well-fitting clothes with his pleasant reasonable way in general, and she had no wish to make a discord in the general harmony.

"I'd love the hoop of diamonds, Jim," she responded earnestly. "I've always wanted a really beautiful ring to go with these stones of Aunt Louise's. And a hoop is perfectly adorable."

Some people might have thought it a prosaic manner of contracting an engagement, but Patricia found it very comfortable. Jim, she decided, watching him as he rose to greet Mrs. Halden, who came with a message about the second part of the program, would never be a nuisance like

some engaged men were. "He's just like a relative—only nicer," she thought approvingly. "We'll get along famously." And then she added with an inward twinkle, "Judy will be awfully set up. She's been trying to show me what was coming, the little minx."

Something in Jim's manner told her what he was going to say to Mrs. Halden, but it gave her a tiny queer thrill to hear the actual words, "Patricia and I are engaged, Mrs. Halden. Don't tell me I'm in luck, for I know it."

Jim spoke with an earnestness that was very winning and Mrs. Halden shook his hand with real feeling. What she said made the happy tears come to Patricia's big gray eyes and gave her added joy in this new arrangement. It was not bad at all, being engaged to a man like Jim, she told herself as Mrs. Halden passed on and the ices were being brought about. She wished with all her heart that Elinor and Bruce were here.

She had only a moment, however, before Miriam came tumultuously upon them,

bearing Penelope and Mrs. Nat with her, and the wish was never voiced.

"Mrs. Halden says——" began Penelope.

"Is it true?" asked Miriam.

Mrs. Nat put two hands on Patricia's white-clad shoulders and Patricia could feel the tremor of the fingers through the gauzy shoulder-straps. What she would have said was not known, however, for into the midst of the little group came Judith, followed by Martie and a crowd of others.

"Oh, Miss Pat," was all that Judith uttered as she slipped in beside Mrs. Nat and felt for Patricia's hand, but Martie was pumping Mr. James North's right arm up and down in the heartiest fashion, crying merrily in sight of all beholders, "Congratulations, Mr. Jim, congratulations! You're elected president of the new society. Miss Pat's Protegés give you a unanimous vote!"

Patricia rippled, but James North shook his head. "There aren't going to be any more protegés after this," he declared gayly. "Miss Pat has taken over a new contract that cancels all others."

There was a general laugh at his flourish of new authority and Patricia laughed with the rest. It was not until long after that the words came back to her. In the merry buzz of congratulation that followed the exit from the supper-room she found great enjoyment. Everyone was so kind that she felt she had made the right choice, and when Mrs. North's rather impressive reception of her was over, she had the feeling that she had made not only the right choice, but the only possible one for her own well-being and happiness.

It was not until the concert was over, with all the performers having acquitted themselves acceptably and a splendid harvest reaped from the bowl system, that she realized what it meant to be really engaged. She came out of the dressing-room in her soft green cloak and her face over the wide fur collar was perplexed.

"I can't find Judith and Martie anywhere," she told Jim, who was waiting for her in the hall. "Did you see them? They surely haven't forgotten they were to go back with us."

Jim smiled. "That's all right," he said, with a proprietary hand on her elbow. "I sent them over in the other car, and Mrs. Spicer, too. We didn't want too much of a crowd just this time, you know."

Patricia was surprised at her queer little fleeting feeling of revolt. She was not used to having her arrangements re-arranged without consultation, but she submitted cheerfully, thinking that after all it didn't greatly matter. The cars belonged to Jim.

She wasn't at all surprised that he should take her hand after the car had started. It gave her a sense of relief that he did nothing more. She had a certainty that the chauffeur had eyes in the back of his head and ears of preternatural keenness. The way was very short and very little could be said, but Patricia found time to voice the wish that Elinor and Bruce might have been with them on this important evening.

"It's the first really astonishing thing that's happened to me all by myself," she said pulling her fur about her neck with her unoccupied hand. "I've always rushed right off to one or another of them with my

great pieces of news, and it seems very queer to have to write—I suppose I shall have to write, for I want them to know it right away before anyone else can tell them."

Jim gave her hand a little squeeze. "I'll run you in town in the morning and we'll spring it on them together," he suggested cheerfully. "I've got to go in, anyway."

Patricia began and then halted. "No, I can't," she said regretfully. "I've promised to see about old Mr. Tomes' room over at Artkin's—we're moving him out of that damp cottage, you know—and besides Constance is coming on the ten-thirty, and then, there's the new baby. No, I'll have to stay home tomorrow, but I'll write a note tonight and you can mail it for me at your station on your way back. There isn't a place open here at this time of night, you know."

He agreed easily and the car slowed to the stepping-stone at Greycroft. He handed Patricia out, and followed her into the well-lighted library, where she flung off her cloak and sat down at once at the desk to write her note. He was really a very comfortable sort

of companion, and being engaged had not spoiled him at all.

Patricia did not find it hard to write her short letter to her beloved sister and Bruce. She dashed the announcement off in her usual characteristic scrawl, adding a word about the arrival of the little waif at the Social House meeting and winding up with assurances that she and Judy would be on hand on Wednesday without fail. "Tell dear Madame Milano that I want very especially to see her," she added in a postscript, recalling her intentions of the afternoon. Then she sealed it and rose, holding it out to Jim, who had also risen, waiting the delivery of the white envelope.

It was all perfectly proper, she told herself afterward, but at the moment she felt a sudden shock at the touch of his lips and the sense of his arm about her. She was used to a demonstrative family, however, and she did not show her sensibility too openly. She managed to say good-night almost at once and she ran up-stairs, wondering at the silence of the house.

"I wonder where Ju and Martie are?"

she thought. "They must have come in long ago. And where's Hannah Ann with her everlasting hot milk?"

Her room was empty and in the tiny moment of entry she found time to realize how much she could miss the cozy routine of her usual home-coming after singing. On all other nights the faithful Hannah Ann would be waiting with a generous portion of warm milk, while Judith, or Elinor, or Bruce, or all of them would be gathering at the head of the stairs or in her lilac room to hear all about it if they had not been with her; or if they had it would be just the same, for then they would come to talk it all over.

Tonight not a soul welcomed her. It was very queer. She flung her wrap and gloves upon the bed and started for the door toward Judith's room. "What in the world has happened?" she said half aloud.

As she swung the door wide Hannah Ann's straight form appeared, carrying the little tray with the pitcher and glass. She was coming from Judith's room, where the sound of carefully subdued voices could

now be heard. Patricia stared, demanding abruptly, "What's the matter? Is Judith sick?"

A reluctant grin widened Hannah Ann's grim lips and a muffled giggle came from the room behind the other door. Martie and Judith appeared in the narrow opening, looking remarkably well and thriving, though with an air of mysterious importance that was puzzling to the mystified Patricia.

"What does it all mean?" she demanded. "Why wasn't anyone up——"

A peal of laughter from Martie and a subdued ripple from Judith was the only answer. Hannah Ann stalked into the middle of Patricia's room and put the tray on the table, her lips tighter than ever. Then she faced about and delivered herself.

"Folks who get engaged to be married needn't expect a hullabaloo every time they come home," she declared. "They don't need it and they don't want it. It ain't in nature fer them to be intrusted in their families. And this family ain't goin' to push itself onto any engaged couple—not while I can keep it from it."

Patricia gasped and then she shook Hannah Ann and kissed her on both her red, hard cheeks. "You old goose!" she cried. "Don't you dare to put such stuff into people's heads. I'm just exactly the same as I ever was. What a silly you must take me for! Here, sit down in that chair," she pushed her into the low wicker seat by the table, "and Judy, bring Martie in here this very minute! You shan't cheat me out of my rights yet a while."

As the two younger girls in lounging robes and slippers came shuffling and laughing in, she waved a stern hand at them, motioning them to the divan in the corner. "Over there with the two of you," she ordered. "I'll slip out of this frock in a jiffy and we'll have a regular symposium. Where's my robe? Oh, here it is. Now, give me the milk, Hannah Ann, and we'll begin."

Her face was shining and her dimples coming and going, as she curled up in the big soft lounging-chair facing the three. She lifted the glass of steamy milk, took a sip, drew a long breath of satisfaction and then turned abruptly to Hannah Ann.

"I've been talking to Mrs. Nat tonight," she said earnestly, "and she's agreed that I shall rig that poor baby up a bit. We'll keep her for a week or so, just to know what sort of an infant she is before we recommend her to anyone. I'm going to get her some things and try to make her attractive—dear knows, she needs it."

Ignoring Hannah Ann's grunt of disapproval of the last words, she faced the two subsiding young persons on the couch.

"If you two have any suggestions as to Miss Felice's wardrobe, trot them out," she commanded. "We'll have to decide on what she's to have at once, for I want her to be quite entirely bewitching when Constance arrives. I've a scheme in that direction. Get a pencil and tablet, Ju, and we'll map out the campaign. I've got a pink linen slip in mind that ought to make her over."

As Judith rushed for the materials, Patricia snuggled down among the cushions, sipping the warm milk and listening to the instant argument between Martie and the good housekeeper as to what a baby of

almost two years might require. Martie on the strength of the abundant Sneath family, felt herself an authority, while Hannah Ann as guardian of the Greycroft honor knew herself to be infallible. Patricia smiled at the ease with which she had turned matters into their old course.

"Being engaged doesn't change one into an unsociable porcupine, and they'll find that out right straight ahead," she thought with a nod. "Wait until they hear about the great Idea—they won't think so poorly of engagements then!"

CHAPTER IV

GETTING UNDER WAY

"MY faith, what is this, a Dorcas meeting?"

Miriam Halden stood in the doorway staring at the scene in Patricia's room. It was ten o'clock in the morning and she had stopped on her way to the station for Constance, hoping that Patricia would reconsider her refusal of last night to make one of the welcoming party.

Patricia sat by the table busily sewing a tuck in a small pink garment, Judith, playing truant from Miss Irving's Select Academy on plea of a cold—she really had a very slight tickling in her throat at times—was putting buttons on a tiny undergarment, while Mrs. Nat in hat and coat was taking some parcels from a bag she had brought in. Everywhere were scraps of wrapping paper, bits of baby-ribbon, shreds of lace and snips of fine muslins.

Mrs. Nat chuckled. Judith went on sewing buttons. Patricia looked up and laughed. "No, it isn't a Dorcas," she responded merrily. "It's merely the Society for Reconstruction of Miss Felice. Want to join us? We're needing just such a nimble needle as you ply, my dear."

Miriam made a wry face, for her hatred of sewing was proverbial. "I've another engagement, my love," she retorted with great politeness. "I merely dropped in to see how the fiancée felt this morning. I see it's quite useless to urge the future Mrs. North to come along——"

"Stuff!" interposed Patricia cheerfully. "I've still a name of my own, I believe. But of course I can't go with you—I told you that last night. We're working overtime, so as to get through before Constance gets here. Can't you manage to entertain her on the way somewhere, so she won't arrive before the job is done? You're a versatile character, and——"

"Take her over by way of Pebble Hill," suggested Mrs. Nat. "Mr. Ives was telling me that he might donate some panels to

the new library building if there could be a suitable place found for them. Constance's decoration in Halden's Big Room took his eye wonderfully, it seems. The scaffolding isn't all away from the library walls, but she can see what sort of place it's going to be, and if there's a chance for the library to get anything more from Mr. Ives, we ought to see that that chance isn't neglected."

"All right, all right," replied Miriam with a grin. "I'll haul her over half the country if you say so, Mrs. Nat. But I ought to know what it all means and why your desire for your dear friend Constance has died such an unnatural death since yesterday, Miss Pat."

Patricia laid down her pink bundle. "I'll show you," she answered briefly. She disappeared into the alcove beyond the bed and brought out a small, still, wide-eyed little figure in a coarse cotton petticoat. Setting the little creature in the midst of the divan cushions, she stepped back with a gesture of introduction.

"Miss Felice Blank, candidate for adop-

tion in the first families of any healthy county of this state," she said impressively. "Or of any other state, for that matter."

Miriam stared at the serious pale face of the little waif. "My faith, she isn't exactly a beauty, is she?" was her involuntary comment. "But she seems a good little thing," she added hastily.

"You've hit the nail on the head," nodded Mrs. Nat. "Miss Pat has her own ideas about all that. We're preparing Felice for the very best set of parents that are on the market, and it seems that Constance is to be the medium for exchange. I don't quite understand all the hurry myself, but I'm putting my trust in Miss Pat. We want to do the best thing for the poor child, of course."

Miriam nodded absently. She seemed to be thinking hard. "Haven't you any playthings for the sorrowful infant?" she demanded abruptly. "What that chick needs is a good laugh. All the clothes in the world won't hide that fearfully meek look she has. I'll dig out some of Helen's old doll-stuff and see what that'll do for

her. You people don't understand these things."

"I think you're right," said Judith emphatically. "Miss Pat was all in a fuss about the orphans at the Home not having imaginations, but she's forgotten to begin right with this one. Toys will be just the thing for her."

Patricia shrugged her shoulders. "That sounds all right to me," she agreed. "Bring your elixirs-of-life over as soon as you will, Miriam. We'll have her in shape to enjoy them by that time."

The clock struck the half-hour and Miriam started. "I'll have to rush," she said slowly, still regarding the small sober Felice with attentive eyes. Then she suddenly stooped, took the small girl in her arms and raised her aloft, rolling her about in the way that children love. "Boo!" she cried in her deepest tones, and she tossed Felice up in the air.

"Oh, don't!" cried Judith starting up. "You'll scare her."

"She's going to cry," flashed Patricia, springing to the rescue.

Mrs. Nat stood quietly looking on.

Felice screwed her face up into a perfect knot and waved her small fists frantically as she went up, but she opened her eyes again as the crestfallen Miriam caught her and brought her down to the cushions again.

"Do't a'den," she piped unexpectedly.

Miriam sat down in sudden relief and then rose triumphant. "What did I tell you?" she crowed. "You people don't know anything about babies. She needs shaking up, I tell you, and I'm coming over later to attend to that part of her schedule myself."

They were too much occupied with the wonder of Felice's own performance to give ear to Miriam's boasting. They dropped down before the large chair in eager attempts to make her repeat the miracle. "Three whole words together, or pretty nearly whole ones!" said Judith impressively. "She can really talk very well. I shouldn't wonder if she might tell us something about herself sometime, if we're careful to keep her in the right humor."

Miriam disappeared without anyone

noticing and the whistle of the distant train broke unexpectedly upon the little group before they had managed to coax a single syllable from the small lips. Patricia heard the long-drawn shriek of the engine and sprang to her feet, putting the baby in Mrs. Nat's lap.

"We haven't a scrap of time," she adjured. "Let's begin at once. The duds are all ready, thanks to our inhuman efforts. That shop in Hilltown proved all you said, Mrs. Nat, and it wasn't half bad to face the gray, dull dawn in such a good cause."

She laughed down Judith's efforts to amend her words. "It seemed like the gray dawn to me, anyway," she asserted stoutly. "And you know those shops open hours before city stores are ready for customers. What a mercy Hannah Ann had her all nicely washed for us. Here, Ju, give Mrs. Nat that petticoat. I'll get the stockings and those cunning little shoes."

It took them longer than they had expected, for Hannah Ann came in with a long box of flowers from Wyndham Towers

and a note which Patricia, under the impression it needed an answer, stopped to read. It was from Jim, merely saying that he had gone to town and would see her about two o'clock for something very special. She wondered, as she tucked it into her blouse, why he needed to write at all when he was coming back so soon. The words had a familiar flavor—"something very special." She smiled as she stooped to pick up the pink dress. "He can't be going to propose all over again," she thought.

"You look very rapturous, Miss Pat," said Judith in an aside. "It must be very exciting to be engaged."

Patricia flushed and then felt vexed with herself for flushing. It did not matter whether she blushed about Jim's note or not. She did not reply to her sister's appreciation, but busied herself with helping put the finishing touches on their charge, and her whole attention was soon fixed upon the transformation of Felice.

"There," said Mrs. Nat, stepping back to view their work. "That's about the best we can do for her, my dears."

Felice looked up at them as they stood surveying her, and even Patricia felt satisfied with the result of their labors. The pale pink smock, the cute little linen shoes, the fluff of dainty lace that peeped from the dress hem, had worked a mighty change. The exercise with Miriam, though brief, had been rather effective, taken with the hurry of being put into new garments by three eager, unaccustomed attendants, and there was a flush on the serious little face. The pale drab hair was brushed into soft rings that gave a softer outline to the small head. Altogether it would have been hard to believe that the little waif could be so quickly improved.

"She's about as good looking as the average child," declared Mrs. Nat with a nod. "And she'll improve, I'm sure. Now, my dears, I must go about my business. Bring Constance over for supper tomorrow night, and in the meantime let me know if anything new turns up. Things have been happening so fast," she added with a chuckle, "that I don't know what to expect next."

She left them with the reconstructed Felice and the disordered room. Judith attended to the former by carrying her down to establish her to the best advantage in the library against the arrival of Constance, while Patricia began to straighten her room in preparation for the same event.

Judith paused on the threshold with the placid Felice in her arms. "Miss Pat, do you really expect Constance to adopt her?" she asked in veiled wonder.

Patricia tossed scraps into the waste-basket with a laugh. "Constance?" she echoed. "Mercy, no, Judy, never in the world. I've merely an idea that among her Odds-and-Ends work she might know of someone who would be just the right mother for Felice. That's all. She knows hosts of all sorts of people and she knows them through and through. She wouldn't be apt to make a mistake. We'd have to trust to the word of strangers, do you see? But if Constance found the parents, it would be a safe thing for all concerned."

Judith nodded with a relieved look and went downstairs and Patricia rushed through

her task in order to join her before the arrival.

It was exactly eleven-five when Miriam triumphantly produced the expected guest. She brought her in with a flourish and delivered her over to Patricia in the hall with an air of great impressiveness.

"I've shown her the skeleton of the library, broken the news of your lost liberty, touched lightly on the charms of the expectant orphan and telephoned to town for Helen to bring that gadding Penelope Homer out with her for a ready-made spree at the club tonight in honor of the distinguished artist in our midst," she rattled off, dropping suddenly into another key to ask, "Where's that baby? I've some particularly invigorating toys about me and I want to put them to work."

She cried out at the sight of Judith's charge, seated in her fluffy pinkness on Judith's lap by the hearth, and Patricia could see that Constance, too, was pleasantly surprised. Evidently Miriam's account of the foundling had not been too flattering.

After a few minutes spent in comment and explanation, they left Miriam to instruct Judith in the mechanism of a returning ball of amazing construction and went up to the pink room where Constance was to be domesticated. The bumping of a trunk could be heard at the back, where Henry was ascending with audible breathing, postponing the talk that was on the tip of each tongue. It seemed an eternity until he had carried in and placed the neat trunk—Constance was always considerate of servants in her luggage—and retired, smiling broadly at the thanks and greeting he had received.

It was eleven-twenty when they found themselves alone, and exactly twelve-forty when Judith appeared in the hall outside the pink room door, demanding calmly whether they had finished yet or should she come back later.

"We've just about reached the point where we need you, Judy," said Constance brightly. "We've told every scrap of news we know and are beginning to feel the need of an arbiter to our argument. I'm telling

Miss Pat she'll need some real scenery for that hall at Point Newton, and she thinks I can manage for her if she can't get the real stuff—what's the matter? Have I said anything I shouldn't?"

She looked in consternation at Judith's surprised face and Patricia's confused one. Patricia shook her head.

"It's all quite right," she said quickly. "I hadn't spoken to Judy yet, because I wanted to make quite certain that it would be accomplished. I wanted to be sure of it before I raised her hopes."

Her tone was so sincere that Judith, who had begun to look hurt, softened at once and put eager questions, and when she had learned all there was to be heard of the new project of opera-pour-tout, as Patricia dubbed it, she was more enthusiastic than Patricia had ever seen her. She offered so eagerly to help in any way she could that Patricia kissed her and vowed that her praise of the project was a tonic in itself and that she should be first assistant when the matter was under way.

The luncheon gong was humming and

Hannah Ann's tall form was in the doorway. "Is that child to have her meals in the pantry or in the dining-room with you all?" she asked severely. "Since she's all dyked out like that, I reckoned you'd want her with you."

"Let's have her," began Judith, but Patricia saw the shadow in Hannah Ann's eyes.

"If it isn't too much trouble to you, Hannah Ann," she said quickly, "I think it'll be nicer to have her with you. You know already what sort of food she needs and she's used to you, too."

Hannah Ann disappeared with a gratified expression on her wooden countenance and the others went down to the lovely old dining-room, where the gossip was gone all over again for Judith's benefit and was discussed once more when Miriam came back at dessert. Rosamond Merton was to marry a horsey millionaire, Griffin had taken a studio in town for the winter, Mrs. Blakely was building a recreation house for the villagers at her summer place, and Miss Tarleton had written Constance that Ran-

dolph Landis was leaving Russia and would be home in November. The chief point of interest, however, centered very naturally on Constance's description of an elderly couple among her country friends who were seeking a child to adopt.

Patricia urged an immediate letter to the worthy Boltons, while Judith hesitated, hoping for added color to Felice by a longer interval at Greycroft. Constance sided with Patricia in seeing no need for delay, but Miriam unexpectedly took the negative side.

"She'll be a peach in another week," she declared. "Just let me have an hour a day with her and you'll see!"

They compromised on a letter to the Boltons making an appointment for the following week and the subject of the improvised party at the Club took first place. Miriam was full of suggestions and Patricia was so absorbed that she did not hear the bell nor notice Henry's presence at her chair back until Judith poked her. She had quite forgotten her appointment with Jim.

"Tell him to come right out," she began and then remembered his "very special" message. "Never mind," she added, rising quickly. "I'll see him first."

She blushed as she went out amid the decorous silence and she wished Jim were not so formal and queer about his *specials*. Being engaged had its stupid sides, it seemed. She did not tell him so, though, for almost before he greeted her he handed her a little box, saying in a rather anxious tone, "I'll change it if you don't like it."

The lovely, sparkling, twinkling circle of white, white diamonds that met her eyes as she pressed the spring of the red box made her cry out, and she slipped the shining circlet on her finger with a deep breath of pleasure in its pure beauty. "It's simply perfect," she said rapturously.

"You ought to have let me do that," he admonished her gently. "The thing isn't done that way, you know," and he took her hand, removed the ring and then put it on her finger again, holding her hand out to survey it critically. "It isn't so bad," he admitted.

"It's gorgeous," she declared. "Do come on out and show the girls. It's too heavenly to keep under a bushel. Constance is here and Miriam, too—we're getting up a party tonight at the Club and we want you to help."

He followed her amiably to the dining-room, where he greeted Constance cordially, agreed to get at least five men for the festivity of the evening and offered to take the four girls over to the movies at Hill-town for the afternoon pictures if they had nothing else to do.

Patricia and Miriam agreed, but Constance had an inspiration. "Why not go over to Point Newton and view the promised land?" she asked carelessly. "We might as well stock up on data for Miss Pat's Great Idea. We're all in the secret and we're all practical people, I believe. We can see the hall and look in at the picture show there—that will give us an idea of the sort of amusement places the Point Newton proletariat is used to."

Jim North seemed to be about to hesitate, but his eyes rested on the glittering

circle on Patricia's left hand and the sight appeared to refresh him. "All right," he agreed cheerfully. "I'll personally conduct you to any slum in Point Newton. This mania for the toughs of that little river town must run its course, I suppose."

While he was telephoning for the five promised men the others went for hats and cloaks. Constance was the first on the stair and she halted so abruptly that Patricia bumped into her. Her voice sounded rather sharp as she put her question.

"Surely Jim isn't talking to Dr. Griggs? I thought he was in the West with that friend of his."

"Oh, he came back ages ago," replied Patricia easily. "Everyone was so glad to see him. He simply wouldn't have been allowed to stay away after his term of service had expired." And she added with more feeling, "he was so sweet to Mrs. Nat when dear Uncle Nat died. You can't think how she depended on him."

Constance said nothing, going on upstairs without comment. Patricia, recalling the old feud between the clever, silent

doctor and her gifted friend, frowned a bit. "I do hope she isn't going to be queer to him," she thought. "She can be very odd when she dislikes a person. I wish she'd get over it. A dinner party is never a success where there's a hatchet hidden."

As she put on her hat she added to herself, "I'll have to patch it up between them. I wonder if I couldn't manage to call him in to look at Felice when we come back. . . ."

CHAPTER V

INTERLUDES

"PATRICIA! Oh, Miss Pat, do wake up. I've something to tell you." It was Judith's voice and she was bending over her sister's bed while the morning sunshine streamed in through the windows and the curtains stirred in the sweet, fresh air.

"Miss Pat, is anything the matter with you?" she added, with a gentler shake to the shoulder nearest her. She had never known Patricia to sleep so deeply.

Patricia, coming slowly back from the land of dreams, protested. She was just handing Randolph Landis a circle of diamonds for his airplane propeller and she wanted to hear what he had to say about it. She opened her eyes drowsily and humped her shoulders. Judith's face seemed very far off to her.

At the third summons, however, she sat up, shrugging and muttering, until her eyes opened quite wide and she was her own cheerful self again. "No, there isn't a thing the matter with me, Judy-pudy," she replied to another anxious inquiry. "I was just dead tired last night, that's all. But I'll be as fit as a fiddle, once I have a splash in the tub. What's your exquisite reason for routing me out? Something very special, I suppose." She laughed a bit at the phrase which had become so customary with her and huddled up her knees, clasping her hands about them while she waited for Judith to reply.

Judith sat down on the bed's edge. "It's about Martie," she said. "She's just been over to tell me. It's two-sided and you'll simply adore it. She's got a prize from the Mozart Club for a song she made up offhand last month; and Miss Ives has offered to send her to any teacher she chooses, pay her board at a really good place and let her take any other course she'd have time for, besides her music. She says she ought to have every chance in

the world. And that's what came from Halden's concert and your talking about Martie's talent to her!" she ended triumphantly.

Patricia woke up entirely then. "What luck!" she cried. "And at the right time of year, too. Martie can start right in wherever she decides to go—it's almost October now and everyone will be ready for regular work. Did she say where she'd like to go? Of course, she needn't stay with Mr. Fitch any longer. She's learned about all he can give her. What luck!"

She was so genuinely delighted that she satisfied even Judith's thirst for enthusiasm and they chattered on about the prize and Martie's prospects until the hall clock sounded and Patricia sprang out of bed with a little cry of dismay.

"Tell Constance I'll be down in a jiffy," she called back as she closed the bathroom door. "Don't wait for me, though, it won't be worth while."

As she ran the water into the tub she hummed a gay tune. Matters were going very well indeed with her and the news

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about Martie was a great delight to her. "I couldn't have done so much for her, even if I had gone on a regular tour," she said to herself. "There are so many, many others to share the proceeds with. And I simply couldn't ask anyone for any more money for anything just now. It seems to me I've pumped every pocketbook dry for those blessed little cripples and the Orphans' Home."

She was back in her room again brushing away at her crinkling hair before another phase of the news struck her. "I'll have that money I was putting aside for Martie to spend on the Opera-pour-tout," she said with a throb of pleasure. She gave a little prance of pure satisfaction and flung her brush across the dressing-table, overturning a toilet-water bottle and sobering her for a moment as she set the bottle right and her eyes fell upon the photograph above the mirror.

It was an enlarged snapshot of the party in front of the American café in Buenos Ayres and the figure of Randolph Landis was particularly distinct. Patricia had

never been able to glance at it during the war-racked days of the past two years without a flicker of regret that her last meeting with him had ended in unfriendly coolness. The sting was gone from it now, however, since Miss Tarleton's news of his homecoming meant that there might be another chance to patch up old scores and begin the friendship that had seemed, in the last weeks at Rockham, to promise so much pleasure, but had ended so badly.

"He'll think it's because he's gotten medals and all that, but I'll show him that I really have liked him all along," she told herself with a glow of satisfaction. Then she added with a ripple, "If he doesn't try to lecture me on the folly of Opera-pour-tout! That would be just like him."

She hurried into her dress and flung open the windows wider still. A pair of jays were squabbling in the yellowing maples beyond the shrubberies and the gay flash of color matched her happy thoughts. She went humming down to breakfast, well pleased with life and her future.

Constance's suggestion of a trip to Point

Newton had put the conspirators in possession of some serviceable facts, and, although Jim had rather grumbled at loitering about wharves and factories, he had agreed to everything Patricia had wished. They had the measurements of the hall, the addresses of a few Italians and Hungarians who constituted the Point Newton Band; they had a fair idea of the number of young people employed in the town factories—three mills of moderate size—and they felt that the field was a good one.

The impromptu party at the Club had come off most happily, with Mrs. Nat's supper the following night to carry on the welcome which Constance always received, no matter how often she came. The breach between her and the dignified Dr. Griggs had not been bridged very successfully, but at least they had not begun any of their interminable arguments which usually ended in a marked chilliness that was rather awkward for their sociable friends. And Dr. Griggs' hearty endorsement of Mrs. Kirk as the best possible person for the Orphans' Home had set Patricia up in her own opinion of such matters.

"I knew that she would be better than Mrs. Dunford," she thought as she went through the library. And she was more than ever determined that Felice should never be sent to the Home while that capable matron was in charge.

The little orphan was still with them and had gained wonderfully under the treatment she received. The care and coddling, the frolic and fun which Miriam, Martie and all of them gave her had agreed most thoroughly with her. She was still very drab in color, but her eyes shone and her lips smiled and even laughed at times. She could not be coaxed to speak, however, and the sight of a strange face made her as stiff and still as a little image. Hannah Ann adored her openly.

As Patricia came into the dining-room the sound of laughter greeted her. Constance at the head of the table was offering a big white grape to Felice, who, in her borrowed high-chair, sat staring doubtfully at it, while she produced from a pocket in her dainty blue smock a large white marble, as though doubtful which might be the

more toothsome. Then she accepted the grape and laid it solemnly beside the marble on the table before her.

Patricia stooped to kiss the back of her soft neck and then dropped into a place at the side of the table. "Those parents of yours are to show up tomorrow, aren't they?" she asked Constance as she took up her orange spoon. "I'm glad they didn't choose today, for I simply must see them. I wouldn't trust merely you and Judy and Mrs. Nat and Hannah Ann to judge their fitness for Felice. Besides, I'm dying of curiosity to see how parents behave when inspecting eligible orphans."

Constance shrugged her shoulders. "They'll be rather tame, I fancy, since they're very sensible people," she returned. "It isn't in them to make a scene. If you want that sort of thing you'd have to go to the Italians or Irish. The reliable parents don't gush much."

"I wish Elinor would come out with you, Miss Pat," said Judith. "Don't you think she'd bring Louise for just one night if you asked her very hard? It would be fun

to see Felice and the baby together. And Jim would take her back the next day if you wanted him to."

Patricia opened her lips to reply, but a cry from Constance stopped her. She sprang up involuntarily as Constance flew to Felice's chair with a sharp "No, no, Felice," and a swift movement toward Felice's lifted hand. It all happened in a second and Patricia could not understand it until she caught the gurgle of indrawn breath, the choking sound and Judith's low exclamation, "She's swallowed the *marble!*"

At once all was confusion, Constance shaking the strangling Felice, while Hannah Ann strode in from the kitchen with wrath in her eye and Judith flew to the window, beckoning frantically to someone in the distance. Patricia stared petrified at the catastrophe.

Felice was drawing horrible, difficult, noisy breaths that grew alarmingly loud as they grew less frequent. Hannah Ann snatched her from Constance and turned her upside-down, but the horrible choking went on. It seemed to Patricia that hours

passed. "It's a marble," she heard Judith saying to someone. Firm steps sounded behind her and Dr. Griggs appeared. Judith had hailed his passing car in the nick of time.

Everyone gave way to him. Constance was pitifully eager in her confession. "I gave her a grape and she ate the marble instead. It's my fault," she said rapidly.

He worked quickly, his face tense with anxiety, and in a moment Felice choked, coughed, breathed more naturally and began to cry lustily, while a great breath of relief came simultaneously from the anxious circle. Hannah Ann caught up the disheveled little victim and bore her off exulting, while Dr. Griggs turned to Constance, speaking in the same crisp voice he had used in his inquiries about Felice. He held out the broken remnants of the crisp white grape.

"In feeding a child that age, it is better to cut the fruit," he said. "Carelessness of this sort is inexcusable in intelligent people."

Then he seemed to come to himself, dropped his severe, official tone and added

sympathetically, "But it's only once in a thousand times such an accident would happen."

He might as well have spoken to the empty air, after that first reprimand. Constance's nerves were in no frame to stand reproof, now that Felice was safe. She bowed icily and stalked out of the room without speaking, leaving Patricia and Judith to make up for her rebuff the best they could.

"Oh, dear, we'll never make them behave like Christians now," sighed Judith. "And it's so inconvenient just when we want to have everyone particularly sociable and pleasant. I wish it had been my marble instead of Constance's grape, now Felice is all right again."

Patricia sighed and then smiled. "Why don't you set your wits to work to make harmony?" she asked teasingly. "You haven't been making any of those experiments of yours for some time. It strikes me there's a field for your talents right here."

Judith frowned thoughtfully, but said

nothing as she followed Patricia up to make ready for their day in town.

Jim came for them promptly—he and Constance had been included in the dinner party at the studio—and they set off through the bright September morning in good spirits and without a sign of the late catastrophe. Hannah Ann held Felice up to wave farewell to them as they turned out of the drive. Their bags with evening clothes were in the tonneau; the day was a perfect one and the prospect of luncheon at the Ritz, a bit of necessary shopping and then dinner with Elinor and Bruce and their two dear friends lifted Patricia's spirits delightfully, and she enjoyed every minute of the time.

She and Jim had been to the studio for a four-sided breakfast the day after Constance arrived and she had no self-consciousness about him now. Her splendid ring was new enough to give her keen pleasure as she watched its sparkle in the lights of the Ritz Palm Garden, but not so new that it embarrassed her as at first. Jim, too, was very reasonable, leaving the girls to do

their small shopping together while he went off on some business of his own, promising to meet them at the studio at seven-thirty promptly.

Patricia managed to telephone to Madame Milano at the Walshire and made an excuse to slip away by herself for half an hour. She found the two ladies in the charming sitting-room which had grown familiar to her, and after a little happy chat about recent happenings she dived straight into her story, telling of her hope to put Penelope's theories into actual practice. "It's done every year by people of leisure, you know," she said earnestly "And I believe it can be done in Point Newton if we try hard enough."

Madame Milano listened to her description of the dreary river town and nodded to Miss Tarleton. "We went through there last year on our way to Rockham, you remember, my dear," she said. "The most uninteresting spot on the globe. I think we should back up this enterprise."

Miss Tarleton nodded in her crisp way. "I'll supply the music scores for the

orchestra," she offered, coming at once to practicalities.

"And I will give those for the principal singers and some costumes that will do admirably for Point Newton," smiled Madame Milano. "I've two trunks full of properties up at Ranstead. I don't know what's in them, but they are yours. Is there anything else you'd like, Miss Pat?"

Patricia blushed. "I didn't intend asking you for actual gifts," she replied gratefully. "I thought that your approval would be enough to bring some of the lion-worshippers into line. You know, we'll really have to have a good deal of support if it's to be kept up all winter, as I plan. You're both of you awfully good to me."

Madame Milano interrupted. "How about scenery?" she asked. "That small theater of mine in Fulton burned last week, as you know, and there's a lot of half-soaked scenery. Could you make any use of it?"

Patricia thought rapidly. "I'm sure we could," she answered. "Those factory boys might be got interested and help, or

we could get carpenters—yes, it will be a great help. When shall I take it away?"

The two ladies laughed at her promptness, though they seemed pleased by it. "You are getting very practical, Miss Pat," said Miss Tarleton as Patricia rose to run away. "Randolph Landis always said you had great capacity. By the way, he's changed his mind about visiting Rockham, it seems his uncle needs him at the University. But we'll talk that all over at dinner, where we'll see the young hero who has captured your heart."

Patricia hurried back to the shop where she had left the others. Her mind was humming with many projects. "I'll get Jim to motor me over to Fulton tomorrow morning or the day after and see what can be done about the scenery," she thought. It seemed strange to her that neither Madame Milano nor Miss Tarleton had met Jim. "They'll like him, I think," she told herself, "but they'll see at once that he isn't any sort of hero—and he hasn't *captured* me; we're perfectly good chums."

She found Judith and Constance and

went with them to the studio, where Elinor and baby Louise and Bruce were simply brimming over with welcome. The rooms were arrayed in festal fashion and an atmosphere of holiday cheer was in the air. Patricia looked about at the flowers and favors on the dining-room table with a bit of wonder mixed in her admiration.

"Faith, you're doing Madame Milano great honor tonight," she said to Bruce, who was bringing in some carved Venetian goblets from the studio cases. "She'll be surprised, for she told me she loved your simple family dinners."

Bruce laughed and came around the table to lay a hand on Patricia's shoulder. "You forget, Patsy darling, that we've a sort of celebration to perform," he said with singular kindliness in his pleasant voice. "These frills are for the future Mrs. James North, my dear."

Patricia dimpled prettily. "How sweet of you two angels to put on these adorable treasures for me," she responded with a gesture toward the antique silver plates, the delicate crystal bowls, the old faience

dishes that adorned the table. "I'd really forgotten all about Jim and me. I'm so used to him, you see."

Bruce looked at her rather earnestly for a second and then replied lightly, "Your grammar is no credit to your elders, my dear, but as we have brought you up, we know you've a good heart." And then with another change he added, "What's all this about opera societies in the rural districts? Elinor has been trying to enlighten me, but I'm not clear about it. Come away to the studio and tell me all about it."

Patricia followed, willing enough. Whatever Bruce Hayden might think of her projects, though he often laughed at and teased her, she knew that his love and loyalty were absolute. Ever since the affair of the jeweled dagger back in the streets and canals of Holland she had known that.

The arrival of Jim half an hour before his time sent them both scurrying. Patricia hurried into her things with a leaping sense of excitement. The gay chatter of Constance and Judith made an accompaniment

to her soaring hopes. She had chosen a pink frock with filmy hanging shoulder-pieces and a glitter of pink scale about the girdle and she was conscious of looking remarkably well.

Jim's bunch of orchids lay on the dressing-table and Jim's glittering hoop shone and twinkled on her finger and she could hear his well-modulated voice out in the studio talking to Elinor. "It's rather nice, being engaged and having everyone like it, too," she thought as she took up the flowers. "I pity those poor girls whose family hate the man—they can't know what being engaged really means."

She pinned on the orchids with a smile at the radiant reflection in the mirror. "My dear, you're going to have the best time of your blessed life," she predicted with a nod. "Tonight will be the happiest one you've known yet."

Somehow, that prediction did not come true. That is, not quite true. The dinner was a great success, the guests were all in the best of humor and the talk was witty and incessant. Jim acted his part accept-

ably, winning a word of sincere praise from Madame Milano as she said good-bye to Patricia, and Patricia told herself she was proud of him. She could not understand what it was she missed. But she did find a vague lack, in spite of herself, and she tried to blame it on herself.

"I'm getting awfully spoiled with all these holidays," she told Elinor as the two went in for a last peep at the sleeping Louise. "I'm not used to so much spare time on my hands and I'm going to quit loafing. I think I'll go back to my old schedule of practice and go in for more concert work. There isn't enough for me to do these days."

Elinor looked mildly surprised. "How about your new plan for Point Newton?" she asked. "And would Jim be willing for you to go back into harness?"

"Jim?" echoed Patricia blankly. "Why, what has Jim to do with concert work?" Then she added hastily, "Of course, I wouldn't take up that again. I've plenty to do, after all. I'm just a bit tired tonight, I fancy. I'll run along to bed now."

CHAPTER VI

FELICE MAKES UP HER MIND

"HERE they come!"

Three pairs of eyes turned eagerly to the window and three heads craned for a better view.

"They look mighty well-kept," commented Mrs. Nat approvingly.

"She's a dear," declared Patricia.

"But he's pleasanter, I think," insisted Judith.

"See how she holds on to Constance's arm," Patricia pointed out. "That shows she's gentle and Constance says she's kind."

Mrs. Nat gave her deep, husky chuckle. "We'd best be moving over to the other side of the house to meet them," she suggested, taking the lead. "Hannah Ann will bring in Felice when we ring and she'll have her in good shape."

Patricia nodded as she flung an arm about Judith and drew her with them. "You aren't going to shirk your responsibility, Judy?" she laughed. "We're all bound to pass judgment and deliver up if the verdict is unanimous—that was the agreement."

Judith hesitated. "I'd really rather stop with Felice," she began, but Patricia would not listen

They reached the library as Constance ushered the two newcomers into the hall, and Patricia glanced up at the portrait over the desk with a fleeting fancy that Aunt Louise was also acting as judge of the affair. The dark, vivid face seemed to glance down at her in a reassuring manner.

Constance led the way, holding back the portière for the couple to follow. When they were within the room, she turned to introduce them first to Mrs. Nat and then in turn to each of the others. "Mrs. Bolton and Mr. Bolton, old friends of mine," she said pleasantly.

The small gentle-looking woman bowed and smiled, winning Patricia's heart still

more, and the sturdy comfortable man shook hands heartily all around, saying in a good round tone, "Very kind of you ladies, I am sure, to let us have a look at the little girl. Wife and I have been looking forward to this visit with a good deal of pleasure, I can tell you."

It was a good beginning and as the matter of Felice was discussed and the Bolton's requirements were explained and their proposals for the education and care of their adopted child told, all of Felice's anxious guardians felt that these were just the right people to take charge of the timid, silent little waif, who was to grow up "a beautie."

Patricia whispered to Judith as she turned to ring the bell for Hannah Ann, "It's as good as done, Ju, and we're in wonderful luck," and then she waited, smiling, for the advent of Felice, hardly hearing the reiteration of the gentle Mrs. Bolton.

"All I ask is good temper in a child," she kept saying with an earnest air. "And it's so hard to judge at an orphan asylum, for the poor things have their tempers

ruffled by stupid creatures, but in a home like this ——"

She broke off as Hannah Ann appeared carrying Felice, who, arrayed in her pink smock and little slippers, looked her very best. She was not yet a beauty, but she did look a very clean, quiet, lovable little thing. Patricia breathed a sigh of relief.

The good couple took to her at once. Mr. Bolton nodded approval and his eyes crinkled amiably as he approached carefully, while his wife began the acquaintance with her prospective daughter by nodding and smiling and waving her gray-gloved hand at her. "Nice baby," she cooed. "Pretty, pretty," and she went a little closer, beaming expectantly.

Felice stared solemnly at them, but she did not shrink back against Hannah Ann as Patricia had feared.

Mrs. Bolton seemed pleased. "You don't want to force them," she said to Mrs. Nat. "Most folks don't understand children. I always go slow and they like that." She spoke in a firmer tone and Patricia began to suspect that she might, after all, be the real head of the house.

"Yes, yes," agreed her husband readily. "Slow and sure, that's the motto."

Mrs. Bolton paused for a while, smiling at the unresponsive Felice, and repeating her recipe for charming the young. Then she advanced another step, shaking her gray gloves again at Felice, who stared without blinking.

"Ah, the dear," said Mrs. Bolton. "She's timid, that's it. Never mind. We'll get to know each other soon."

Her manner was so mild and they were all so intently watching her gentle smiling face that they forgot Felice for the moment. Here, indeed, was the mother for any orphan. Mrs. Nat was beaming, Constance looked elated and Judith appeared entirely satisfied. Mrs. Bolton took another step toward the baby, holding out her arms to her and quite forgetting her audience in her joy in the prospect of possession. "Come to mother," she murmured. "Come, my lamb."

Felice did not shrink as she saw the advancing arms. She leaned out of Hannah Ann's arms and flung out a hand.

Patricia glowed at the sight. "She's taking to her wonder——" She halted, gasping, "Oh, Felice, Felice!" she cried.

Felice had brought her small hand down with a sharp smack straight on Mrs. Bolton's cheek!

There was no patching up the beautiful arrangement after that. Mrs. Bolton, though she did not show resentment, said very gently and firmly that she thought they had better be going, since what she must have in a child was a good temper. Nothing her husband could say, nothing that Constance could urge—the Greycroft party were too crestfallen to argue—nothing would move her. She said she understood that the child might be frightened by strangers and she could have forgiven some timidity, but positive bad temper she could not and would not tolerate.

"I'm too old to start in to reform a child," she said with an apologetic smile, as Felice was borne away in disgrace. "I don't mind whims, but I do ask good temper in a child. I thank you all for the trouble you've taken, but I think we'll be going."

And in spite of Mr. Bolton's protests she carried him off for the very next train, leaving the four disappointed guardians staring at one another in dismay.

"Who'd have dreamed she was such a little wildcat?" exclaimed Mrs. Nat. "Someone has been to blame for that trick. The woman who wrote the card let her have her way, it seems. Well, that's over and done with. We'll have to look up something else. The Orphans' Home is always there to fall back on, in case no one else will take her."

The others were very silent. Judith came into the music-room with Patricia after Mrs. Nat had gone and her face was troubled. "Mary Smith was asking me about adopting Felice, but I told her she was taken. Do you think I might tell her there was a chance?"

Patricia looked up from the music she was sorting on the rack. "But Mary Smith keeps house for Mrs. Nat," she began.

"It's for her sister at Steelton," interrupted Judith. "She's a widow, you know.

And she's young enough to stand Felice." Judith's tone was dejected, for her hopes had been high. "I'll tell Mary if you say so," she added.

"All right," said Patricia indifferently. As Judith moved to the door she called her back. "Better let Mrs. Nat fix it up, Judy," she advised. "And don't blame Felice too much. She doesn't know any better, poor mite. She's probably been slapped about herself. We'll have to look after her a bit better, that's all."

Judith brightened. The event began to lose the solemn significance cast about it by gentle Mrs. Bolton. "She's only eighteen months old, after all, and she's just a door-step baby," she mused. "We'll try again, Miss Pat, and keep on trying, won't we?"

Patricia nodded absently, with her eyes on her music, and Judith once more moved away. This time she halted of her own accord. Her hand was in her pocket and her face had undergone a change. She came back to the piano.

"I've something for you," she said,

bringing out two cards with scribbled names among the print. She seemed very proud of them.

Patricia glanced at them, screwed up her eyes and looked again. "What in the world——" she asked.

"It's Martie's idea as well as mine," Judith told her. "Martie knows all about the meeting, for a girl she's giving lessons to has a sister in the mill, and there'll be most of the girls and some of the older women, too, but not many——"

"What *are* you talking about?" asked Patricia taking the cards and reading them. "And why should I go to a shirt-waist girls' meeting?"

Judith became patience itself. "Martie heard that her girl's sister had a splendid voice, not trained but wonderful, and there are some others who can sing, and we thought you might go there and ask them to help with the chorus of the opera, you see. They know everyone who can sing or play anything, and it would be a great chance to get started in earnest. Martie got the tickets, but I made her ask, so don't blame her if it's wrong."

"Judy, you blessed angel! What a splendid idea!" cried Patricia, transformed in an instant. She sprang up and seized Judith about the waist, twirling her about in a mad fashion, and then dropped her on the window-seat breathless. "Judith Kendall," she said standing before her with an impressive finger pointed at her, "you've hit the nail on the head once again. I'll go to the meeting—*we'll* go, you and I, and we'll be very polite and crafty and cordial—not a bit condescending and horrid like real reformers. We'll start the ball rolling this very week. And we'll organize the Opera Club right at that meeting."

Judith was delighted, but she had a suggestion. "Don't you think we'd better wait till we see how the shirt-waist girls take it?" she said practically. "They may not take it at all, you know. And then you'd have to organize all over again, with members of another sort."

"Solomanirva, thou hast spoken," said Patricia heartily. "We will wait till we see if we have any shirt-waisters for our singing society, and then we'll plunge in."

She sat down on the bench and stared at the music rack. "Anyway, I've got to have a lesson with Tancredi tomorrow, and she may give me some useful tips—she's such an old dear," she said thoughtfully. "Yes, we'll wait till after the meeting and then we'll act."

Judith lingered. "How shall we get over to Point Newton tomorrow?" she asked casually. "Will Jim——"

"Not a bit of it," interrupted Patricia firmly. "This is between you and me. Tell Martie not to mention it. We'll have our little car and slip off by ourselves. What a lark it's going to be!"

After Judith had gone Constance drifted in.

"There's nobody half so mulish as those gentle little women," she remarked to the piano. "He wanted Felice in spite of her slugging ability, but he'll never change that sweet little wife of his."

Patricia smiled up at her with ready philosophy. "We'll try again—Rome wasn't built in a day," she said, softly sounding chords with her finger-tips. "There surely

must be a set of parents for Felice and we'll dig them out for her, be assured."

Constance glanced at her critically. "You seem awfully pleased about it," she commented with wonder. "I expected to have to console you, but you're grinning like a Chessy-cat. What are you up to now? I know that look, my dear."

Patricia evaded as best she could, but Constance was only half satisfied. "I believe you're going to keep that infant yourself," she said suddenly, and Patricia's hilarious protests did not convince her. Hannah Ann saved Patricia from further discussion by appearing in the hall doorway with the information that the telephone was ringing.

It was Jim and he offered to take Patricia in for her lesson with Tancredi in the morning and then have lunch at the Blue Moon in Lawnton. Patricia accepted for the morning, but had to refuse the luncheon. "Unless I can be home by two," she said. "I've an engagement for the afternoon. No, I can't break it. No, I can't tell you what it is just now. It isn't anything—that is, I'll tell you tomorrow night."

She hung up, feeling slightly disturbed at Jim's masterful tone. "I'll not tell him what it is tonight, either," she said firmly. "He needn't expect me to. If he can't trust me until tomorrow night——"

She did not finish the sentence, but she shut her lips very tight. She was not used to being questioned in this fashion, and particularly by Jim.

She shut her lips again later on, after she had parted from Jim at the library door, where they had lingered after the drive from Nelson's barn dance. She went slowly up the stairs with her mouth in a very determined line.

"It's all very well to be fond of a person, but it isn't necessary to spend every living, breathing minute of one's time together. Jim will just have to learn I have affairs of my own to attend, if he hasn't. It's odd how different a man can be after he's engaged."

The next day she felt rather ashamed of her annoyance, for the morning passed without a shadow. They had lunch at the Blue Moon, racing back in time to hear the

hall clock chime two long, melodious strokes; and Jim had not asked a single question about the afternoon.

Judith watched his big car speed away and then she pulled on her hat with nervous haste. "I've the tickets safe and sound," she told Patricia as they went out. "Henry washed the car and there's plenty of gasoline. Isn't it exciting?"

Patricia gurgled. "What, the gasoline?" she teased. "Frightfully so. I feel it going to my head already. Come along, though, we must be early, so as not to be conspicuous."

On their way out they passed Hannah Ann in her sober out-door clothes, with Felice in her pink sweater suit bundled in the new go-cart that Jim had brought from town the day before. She blinked up at them with the sun in her eyes at first, but when she saw who it was, she burst into cheerful babbling, waving her hands hilariously and kicking her pink feet about in a sudden transport of delight. It was the greatest demonstration she had ever made.

Patricia stooped to kiss the little face and then joined Judith at the stable, glancing back over her shoulder at the small pink figure in the sunshine.

"Who could ever have dreamed she'd act as she did today?" she said as she took the wheel and started the car. "She never did such a thing before."

Judith settled down enjoyably. "I believe she did it on purpose," she declared positively. "I think she knew that the Boltons were going to take her away, and she made up her mind not to go."

Patricia had a sudden preposterous sinking of the heart. She liked Felice, but she did not desire any permanent orphan for her very own. "Suppose she makes up her mind to turn down all the eligible parents we find for her, what then?" she asked whimsically. "Suppose she decides to spend her life at Greycroft?"

Judith giggled. "Then," she began, and stopped. "But that's nonsense," she added in another tone. "Someone will turn up for her, I guess. Is your watch right today? Mine's slow and the meeting is for two-

forty-five, you know. It's the last half-holiday they have, Martie says, and so it's lucky we happened to know of it. We couldn't have managed it at night so well."

CHAPTER VII

THE HALL OVER THE TIN-SHOP

THE small dingy hall over the tin-shop was crowded to suffocation as the two went in. All sorts and sizes of girls and women were to be seen, from the doorkeeper, a stout, stolid, smiling blonde in embroidered blouse and high-heeled run-over white shoes to the dark, nervous, excitable faces of the Italian and Jewish members on the platform. Everywhere were girls and women, on the chairs in the aisles, crowding each other at the back of the hall, sitting on the wide, high window-sills of the big, old-fashioned windows; and over all was the buzz and hum of intensely eager, earnest, whispered comment.

A woman had risen on the center of the platform and all eyes were fixed upon her while a rustle, partly of approval and partly of dissent, ran about the place.

"We're late, after all," whispered Judith as they halted uncertainly inside the door, glancing about for a nook to bestow themselves in.

A girl with a large piece of yellow ribbon pinned on her arm pushed her way towards them, beckoning them to follow and hurrying off through the crowded aisle straight toward the stage. There was nothing to do save follow, but Patricia felt very uncomfortable when she found that their seats were upon the platform among the close-packed rows of little folding chairs. She was not made more at ease by being placed at the extreme end of the second row, in full view of the entire assembly. She was used to audiences staring, but she felt the many curious eyes of this audience as she had never felt eyes upon her before.

She looked at the straight figure of the woman who had risen when they entered the hall, she glanced down at the intent eyes of the faces in the body of the hall and her heart sank within her. "I'll never be able to talk light opera to these people," she thought, noting the stern profile of the

large lean girl next to Judith. She heartily wished they had not come.

The leader rapped for order and then began to open the meeting, and while she was announcing the order of procedure and the speakers of the afternoon, Patricia felt a touch on her shoulder and turned to meet the dark, brilliant eyes of a small, vivacious young woman in cheap, very stylish clothes.

"You're the delegate from Pittsfield, aren't you?" she asked in a low whisper. "Annie Sands sent a message to you. She can't come, and she wants you to read her letter to the girls."

Patricia twisted about to face her questioner, surprise showing in every feature. "I'm not a delegate at all," she returned in the same low tone. "We had the tickets from a friend of Miss Sneath's and——"

The girl broke in with a hurried whisper and when she found how Patricia and Judith had come and what was their purpose, she said, "Wait a minute," and as the chairman finished speaking she rose, addressing both platform and assembly.

"Before the meeting begins business,"

she said in a clear, assured voice, "I want to present a matter which has come before me. Through some mistake, we have with us on the platform here a lady who is not a member of any union, but who wants to make you a little speech. I hope you'll listen; she won't be long and the meeting will then go on. Miss Patricia Kendall, a singer whom we ought to know, but don't, will now address you."

She gave Patricia an encouraging touch on the shoulder and sat down, while all the eyes in the house which had strayed to the chairman now focused again on Patricia.

Mechanically, at the nod from the chairman, who had also risen again and turned toward that part of the platform, Patricia got to her feet. She was almost petrified with the suddenness of it, but her concert training stood her in good stead. She bowed to the chairman and glanced about the hall and, though her heart was thumping madly and her hands were cold with nervousness, she did not show her agitation, and her voice was very sweet and clear as she began to speak.

"I am very sorry to have gotten up here under false pretenses," she said with a smile. "But since I am here I will explain why I have come and I will be very brief. I hope I shan't bore you too much."

There was a slight rustle, which she did not stop to analyze as either assent or denial, but went rapidly on. She told them of her interest in opera, of her desire to get together all the music-lovers of the community to form a society in which all could take the part best fitted to their capacities, and she wound up her very short speech with a list of the material already available. "We have some scenery which can be patched up easily, I think, and the scores for both orchestra—a small orchestra—and principal singers, for any light opera we shall choose," she explained. "And some costumes from Madame Milano's own trunks." Here was a decided rustle among the dark-haired members and a flash of white Italian teeth greeted the familiar name, but the rest of the audience appeared indifferent to the mention of the *diva*. "It will be quite easy, I believe, to manage the

practical end of it, but what I am here for today is to get singers. Won't any of you who have voices or can play any instrument or who have friends who would like to join the society, please send your names to me? Then we can have a meeting here in Point Newton and arrange matters comfortably."

There was a murmur of approval, but one harsh feminine voice shouted from a hidden corner at the back of the hall:

"She's stringin' you, girls! She ain't no singer—she's a——"

The voice was quenched before it went further, but it gave Patricia a glimpse of what she might have to face at Point Newton. It gave her an inspiration, too. Her spirit flared up at the injustice of ignorance and she turned to the chairman with her gray eyes alight and her face very serious. "May I prove my claims? I know it's very unparliamentary," she said, "but I see a piano here and I am sure you will give me another two minutes."

The frown on the leader's brow was not for Patricia. She motioned toward the shabby instrument at the other end of the

stage. "Justice demands our service," she said rather pompously. "Our sister in the rear of the audience has committed us to that much."

Patricia was conscious of Judith's hand on hers, but she needed no encouragement, for her spirit was up. To be accused by an unknown, unseen enemy was not agreeable to her temper and to be accused of duplicity was doubly stinging.

She made her way across the platform, threading the narrow aisle without consciousness of the interested faces turning toward her. She had forgotten her audience in the selection of her song. She seated herself on the wobbly stool and ran her fingers lightly over the keys, thanking her fates once again for the long training in instrumental work that made accompaniment easy to her.

She chose the *Numi Pieta* from "Aida" as her answer, and she sang the first lines of it with all the art and fervor of her being, remembering, even while she was conscious of her shabby audience, that night in Buenos Ayres when the Barsini's

hisses had won such a triumph for Madame Milano. It seemed to her that all opera was beset with difficulty. She did not sing it through, but ended at the second line, determined to be scrupulous as to the time accorded her. It was a very small sample and yet she trusted it.

As the golden notes of that lament died and Patricia's hands dropped from the keys, a curious stirring sound as of awakening came from the audience, and then from the Italians' corner the applause began, clapping, cries of "Bravo!" and "Encore!" until more slowly the other parts of the hall took up the clapping and the place was filled with the noise of it.

"Give us some more!" cried a hard-faced, tow-headed girl from the front row. "That's the stuff. Give us some more!"

Patricia rose. She smiled straight at the hard-faced girl and answered in her friendliest tone. "I'm sorry I can't go on," she told her. "I mustn't take up the time, you know. But if you'll come to our meeting next week, I'll sing as long as you want me to."

Then with another bow to the platform and with a motion to Judith to follow her, she made her way quickly to the door, smiling her friendly smile on all whose eyes she met.

In the vestibule Judith halted her. She had a very anxious expression on her face. "You didn't tell them——" she began when the door opened and the stout, placid doorkeeper appeared.

"Won't you please leave your address, so's the girls can know where to write?" she asked, producing a pencil and pad. "There's plenty of 'em can sing and I guess they'd like to try, anyway. I'm mezzo myself. When are you going to have that meeting?"

Patricia told her that would depend on the number of volunteers at Point Newton. If she received enough names to make up a chorus or part of the orchestra, she would arrange for it the following Wednesday. She signed her name as clearly as possible and printed the address, as the most important part. Then they said good-bye to the girl, whose name was Maddie Finn, and

went down the flight of dusty rickety stairs into the street.

"Thank heaven that's over," said Patricia fervently. "Who ever dreamed of such a muddle! We certainly made hash of our neat program, Ju, when we followed that yellow-ribboned usher straight into the lions' den. How could we ever be so stupid!"

Judith snapped the car door shut and settled down. "It's all turned out splendidly, and that's the main thing," she declared. "Those girls will be more apt to come to the meeting now. If you'd gotten up with a tame invitation, like most people do, they wouldn't have had half the interest. I believe we'll have a lot of names."

Patricia was thinking. "We can't get many names at once," she said thoughtfully. "And we can't tell whether our trip is going to be a fizzle or not until we see how many want to join. I believe we'd better not say anything about it until we see what's the upshot. Martie will keep quiet if you tell her how it is. We ought

to have most of the names by Monday, I think."

"Or Tuesday morning," amended Judith. "Some of them would write Sunday night and post it on their way to work in the morning and the Point Newton mail takes a day to get over, you know."

They settled it then that they were to wait until Tuesday to announce the result of their clandestine trip and the matter was dropped, as at the turn of the river road they caught sight of Mrs. North's large gray limousine coming down the Fulton Road at its usual dignified pace, and Patricia spurted into the Laurel Drive.

"We don't want her speaking of meeting us on the river road," she explained. "Jim's able to put two and two together and he'd know that we were over here for Opera Society work, and he'd make us 'fess up. He has such a high-and-mighty notion of me these days that he doesn't want me to go about like I used to."

Judith was a warm partisan of Jim, but she sniffed loftily. "I think you were very well taken care of by Bruce and Elinor and all of us," she rejoined crisply.

Patricia was amused at her manner, but the car claimed her attention and she did not answer. Judith went on more placidly.

"I think it's sort of odd having a formal dinner on Sunday. We aren't used to it here in Rockham, but I'm glad Mrs. North has it now when Bruce and Elinor can come out. It'll be so jolly to have Louise here while Felice is still with us," she said. "And as they'll stay till Monday night, we may have some letters to talk over. I like the whole family in all the plans, don't you?"

Patricia nodded with a little crinkle in her lips. "I thought you were rather fond of having some private mysteries up your sleeve," she teased. "You must have had a change of heart recently."

The random words made Judith blush suspiciously, but she went on with her topic. Mrs. North's dinner at Wyndham Towers on the following evening was most interesting to them both and Patricia was quite willing to leave Judith's mysteries for the immediate matter. "I'll feel sort of queer—like Exhibit A," she confessed.

"Those formal dinners are sometimes awfully trying, even when one isn't the chief dish."

Judith's scandalized look made her add hastily, "Of course I like all those North people, but you know, Ju darling, that they aren't the sort one can be very jolly with—not like our own set."

"They're not half as clever, if that's what you mean," said Judith with unexpected irreverence for the Wyndham Towers habitués. "But they're people you are to be with the rest of your life, so you might as well get used to them."

The words sank into Patricia's mind with definite effect. She resented them without refuting them. She would not spend her life entirely among the correct conventionalities of the North family connection, she told herself warmly; she had her own family and her own friends, who were also Jim's friends. "He'll be quite as much one of our family as I of his," she thought. "It's six of one and half-a-dozen of the other."

This rational point of view appeared to

be a difficult one, however, and it seemed increasingly hard to make others see it in the way she herself did. Jim, on the matter of her afternoon adventure, gave way easily enough to her promise to tell him later, but he insisted that she pledge herself not to have any further secrets from him, and that he must escort her to all future club meetings, tennis matches, concerts and what-not, whether at night or in the afternoon.

"It's the right thing when a fellow has the time for it, you know," he argued with such good-natured earnestness that Patricia gave in. "Mother sees it just as I do. And as you haven't any mother of your own, you're bound to take her word, you know. She's mighty fond of you, Patricia. She's planning to fix up that west wing for you, enlarge the music-room and put in a new grand piano."

Patricia murmured something meant for gratitude, but in reality she felt amazed at such ardor on the part of Jim's family, with the engagement not a fortnight old.

Jim went on hopefully. "The dinner's going to be the real thing. I wish you'd

wear that blue thing of yours. She's having Mottino's orchestra from town and that organist-fellow for the after piece. She's set on welcoming you in good shape. It's awfully white of her, when she was so set on Alice Mannering, as I told you. By the way," he added in another tone, "when are you going to ship that cute kid? Haven't you had enough of it yet?"

Patricia's explanation that Felice was to stop a little longer at Greycroft because of Elinor and Baby Louise did not seem to satisfy him. "You'll have to ship her off soon," he said. "Those charity kids aren't any good, anyway. She'll get spoiled if you people keep her going the rounds visiting you. She won't be content with the Home, and Mrs. Dunford oughtn't to have any more of those imps on her hands."

His one visit to the Orphanage on an errand with Patricia on the way to the Country Club had made a deep impression on him. "Those people ought to stick together," he added firmly. "It's mistaken kindness to try to chum up with them. And say," he went on, reverting as was his habit, "I've thought that opera stunt over,

and I'm asking you to pull out before it's too late. That tough set at Point Newton isn't the thing for you."

Patricia was about to tell him that it was already too late, but as that would necessitate the story of the afternoon adventure, she shut her lips. "We'll talk that over later," she replied as gently as she could. "Now tell me about Alice Mannering. I've heard so much about her and I'm so glad she is to be at the dinner tomorrow. She's a perfect beauty, isn't she?"

He was diverted but not appeased, and when he came in later to find her with some stuff spread out, preparing to cut out a pink romper for Felice, he was distinctly vexed. He laid his hand on the stuff with a gesture of authority. "Patricia, I'm asking you to give up playing maid to this charity child," he said impatiently.

And as before, Patricia did not reply directly. She looked him squarely in the eyes and poised her scissors for the act.

"I'll wear the blue frock, as you suggested, Jimmy dear," she retorted sweetly.

And then she cut the first determined slash into the pink material.

CHAPTER VIII

FULL TONES AND HALF TONES

"AND do you really like that sort of thing?"

The question was put in a sweet voice and with a charming smile. There was no hint of criticism in the tone, only a genuine wonder that held some admiration. Alice Mannering was looking at Patricia with her deep-fringed starry eyes and her head was bent amiably toward her.

Patricia laughed a clear, melodious ripple. She glanced across the table to where Constance in a wonderful golden-meshed lace frock was talking rather stiffly to her left-hand neighbor, Dr. Griggs. And then she said lightly, "You think me a sort of freak, don't you, because I like both sides of the picture, the gay, painted side and the underneath plain dull side. You ought to know Constance—she's got more friends in

the East Side than the Bureau of Charities itself, and she does more good there than anyone I know."

Miss Mannering turned her starry gaze toward that end of the table. Admiration was plainer than ever on her face. "And such a perfect gown," she murmured. "It's unusual. All the girls I know who go in for that sort of thing really, you know, and not just for fun, are just a shade odd. My cousin Lois and others——" She did not finish, as her next neighbor started a conversation with her at this point and Patricia turned to Mr. Hugo North of Sibley Crag, an uncle of Jim, and the talk became general.

After dinner, however, in the drawing-room when the company was moving toward the music-room, where the celebrated organist Vincent was already playing the prelude to the sacred selection which Mrs. North had chosen as appropriate to the day, Patricia felt a touch on her arm.

It was Alice Mannering and her lovely face was alight with friendly interest. "Do tell me about that baby you found on the

door-step," she said unexpectedly. "Miss Judith says that she promises to be a beauty when she is more grown."

Patricia could not help smiling at the evident plotting of Judith. It was quite plain that she had been anticipating matters in regard to Felice's appearance, in the wild hope that this charming young lady might be interested in the little waif. "There isn't much to tell, and I'm afraid there isn't much to say of her good looks as yet," she replied, and then as they moved on with the others she gave a brief account of Felice's advent, the efforts they were making to find suitable parents for her and wound up with a humorous description of the interview with the Boltons, all of which was very diverting to her hearer.

At the door of the music-room Jim claimed her, while Dr. Griggs made his way to Miss Mannering with the air of an old acquaintance, and Patricia found herself in a group of the North family connections from which she did not part until the general breaking up of the party. It was not a particularly enlivening evening, after

all. Alice Mannering was the best thing about it for Patricia, who loved beauty with a whole heart, and she did not speak to Alice Mannering again until they were on the front terrace in their wraps, with the motors panting in a long line all up the slope of the driveway and far down across the park and into the distant street.

Instead she talked to Mr. Hugo North and Mrs. Clement Chartress and Miss Newhold, all very kind and inquisitive and correctly critical; she chatted with Mr. Benjamin Watterwold, the millionaire philanthropist, who talked incessantly and never listened to a word from her; she exchanged a few uninteresting sentences with the great social worker, Mrs. Buzby Sunderson, who evidently had no opinion whatever of the butterfly singer before her and whose open disapproval of Patricia's gay replies to her heavy questions was apparent to all.

"I'm not having a bit of a good time," she told herself in some disappointment, "and if I keep up this eternal smiling much longer, I'll never get my face back to

normal again. I wonder why everyone seems different to me tonight? Even Judy stares at me in a queer fashion."

She found out why Judith favored her with those occasional round-eyed glances when they were in the dressing-room. Judith never kept Patricia waiting long. "I heard you telling Miss Mannering about the slap," she said in a hurried undertone. "Oh, Miss Pat, you do put your foot in it sometimes!"

Patricia's spirits began to rise. "You've been plotting again, you little wretch," she exclaimed. "You actually were hoping that perfect creature to take an interest and perhaps adopt Felice!"

Judith blushed, but did not deny the charge. "You never know what people will do," she returned sagely. "I don't care if you do laugh, Patricia." And she went off with Bruce and Elinor with her head very high on her slender young neck.

The little episode almost restored Patricia's spirits to normal, and when she met Alice Mannering on the terrace and made an engagement for the football game

the following Saturday, she began to feel that the party was quite a success. In the car with Jim on the way home, she was entirely herself again, forgetting those stiff creases in her cheeks that she had feared might never be effaced. Jim was quite satisfied with her, with the dinner and the guests altogether. He approved the plan for the next Saturday and did not once mention orphans or slums.

"He's quite a dear," Patricia thought as she ran upstairs to the cozy glow of lamp and firelight where the home group were waiting to talk things over in the usual pleasant way. "And it's sweet of Mrs. North to make such a fuss over me, when she might have had a much more perfect daughter-in-law. I was a pig to feel as I did tonight, and it shan't ever happen again."

She stood in the doorway, smiling at the dear, familiar faces and for the tiniest fraction of a second she had a fleeting pang of loneliness at the thought of Wyndham Towers and the wing that was to be prepared for her there; but she shook it off

with a joyful sense of present possession in the warm heart-shelter of the welcoming circle and she crowded in between Bruce and Elinor on the divan, nodding to Constance on the hearth-rug and Judith by the table.

"It's awfully jolly to go out, but it's jollier still to come back and talk it over," she said with a little sigh of satisfaction. "Isn't Miss Mannering lovely? I've lost my heart completely. She seems so kind, in spite of being so beautiful."

Bruce chuckled. "Dr. Griggs seemed to find her so," he said. "I've never seen him so sociable to a female person before."

Patricia caught a queer look on Constance's face, but she put it down to the leaping firelight. She knew that Constance never got on with the doctor, and so must be indifferent to him. "They'd make a stunning couple," she remarked absently, her mind being full of other things suggested by the feel of Bruce's hand. The third finger of his right hand had a small knob worn by the use of the brush and as her fingers came in contact with it she recalled many questions she wanted to ask.

"How are you getting on with the Municipal panels?" she inquired. "Did those studies you made at Point Newton do for the water-ways panel?"

Constance turned eagerly and her face was bright with interest. It would have been preposterous to fancy she had blushed. Constance's whole heart was in her painting and her carefully hidden charities. Patricia stole an arm about Elinor and, with her hand in Bruce's, leaned back among the cushions. She felt very rich and very happy and she wished with all her heart that she might tell them of the meeting at the hall over the tin-shop. "They'll understand and they'll have some sensible suggestions, too," she thought. "I believe I will, after all."

With a sign to Judith, understood by the old habit between them, she began her story, while they listened with just the sort of earnest attention she had known they would show. It was very pleasant to discuss the whole thing with Elinor and Bruce and Constance, and she did not regret her change of mind. The ready support

and apt suggestions of the three were very gratifying to both of the principals, though Patricia had a special sense of relief in their approval. She remembered Jim's discouraging words and she felt equipped now for the confession she would make on the morrow.

"For I'll have to tell him, too," she thought. "It will be nice to be able to say that Bruce thinks we can make the thing a success. Jim has such respect for Bruce."

The Monday morning, however, gave her no chance for telling Jim. Her lesson with Tancredi had been postponed on account of Elinor's visit and as Doris Long was coming over, with Penelope and Mrs. Nat, to spend the morning making up some more things for Felice, Jim had merely stopped for a brief moment as he called for Bruce on the way to morning golf at the Club, and there had been no time for conversation.

Patricia did not in the least mind the delay. She was wholly taken up with the joy of having Elinor at home again, the

fun of playing with Louise and Felice and the discussion about the new garments required for the little orphan. Mrs. Nat advocated one warm outer covering for the present, since if Felice were either to go into the Home or to be adopted, she must have something provided by the taste or necessity of her guardians.

Elinor supported this view, and Patricia, who had been longing for a dull blue coat and cap, with leggings of the same, had to confess that they were right. Constance, coming in unexpectedly, agreed and it was decided that only a cloak should be furnished until Felice's future was more definite. Louise's cloak was brought down and a pattern cut off in newspaper. Then they settled down to finishing the petticoats and rompers which were needed at once. The two babies, nearly of an age, played together on the hearth-rug, Louise with dimples and gurglings and Felice with staid, timid gestures, while the sewing and chatter went on.

It was a cold, sharp day with a hint of coming rain in the occasional sullen clouds

and there was added coziness in the warmth and comfort of the roomy library where they sat. Time went by rapidly in talk and work, and when Hannah Ann came in with the second mail Patricia gave a start of surprise. There were five letters and two postals in unknown writing, beside some letters in familiar hands. The first fruits of the Saturday meeting had arrived.

Patricia had to tell Penelope and Mrs. Nat, though, by consent of all, she reserved the opening of the letters postmarked with the Point Newton stamp until Judith should have returned from the Academy.

It was decidedly nice to have Mrs. Nat's amused approval and to see Penelope's eyes shine, and furthermore, it was a sort of triumph to finger those five envelopes and to read over and over the postal which boldly proclaimed itself from Maddie Finn and announced herself ready for any mezzo part. Patricia felt that she had made a strong point in favor of opera-for-all and she awaited Jim's return with some impatience.

At the first sound of the car she ran out

into the keen air with her bright hair ruffling in the east wind and her cheeks flushed with expectation. She knew that Jim must be pleased by her successful beginning. She beamed on Bruce as he jumped out, golf-bag in hand.

"Five letters and a postal already!" she announced and his ready response made her surer than ever of Jim.

"Take me for a run, Jim," she urged, slipping into the sweater which she had caught up in her flight. "I've something jolly to tell you."

Jim stepped out, handed her ceremoniously into the front seat, stepped in, closed the door with a crisp snap and started the car, all in perfect silence which was not usual in Jim. Patricia looked at him in some surprise.

"What's the matter?" she asked in her direct way. "Anything happened? You look so queer."

Jim did not speak even then. He bent, reached a paper from the rack beneath the speedometer and handed it to her. He kept his eyes steadily fixed on the road all the

time. She thought he was acting very oddly indeed, not at all like himself, and she opened the paper mechanically, expecting some startling city news, the crash of the North fortunes or the death of some North potentate.

"Why, it's the Point Newton *Leader!*" she exclaimed in astonishment as she glanced at the limp little ill-printed local paper, a weekly edition of which came out every Saturday night.

Jim nodded, and then, being human after all, he pointed to a column with pale but emphatic head-lines. "I don't wonder you were ashamed to tell me where you were," he said. "After the way we talked it over, too. I thought you were done with that sort of thing."

Patricia's eyes were busy while he spoke and she looked up with a gleam of amusement in her face. "I don't see that it's so dreadful," she returned cheerfully. "They only made a couple of mistakes. I'm not a constant associate of Madame Milano's, and I didn't sing an aria from a French opera,—it was just a scrap from 'Aida'——"

She broke off, surprised at the stern expression of his face. "Why, you don't—you surely don't care so much as that about it," she exclaimed. "It was all perfectly right. I meant to tell you right away, but I waited till I had some letters. I thought you'd be more interested if you saw the response to my invitation. I would have told you this morning if you'd have given me time."

"Yes, after all the country-side knows about it," he replied rather bitterly, but she could see his ill-humor was beginning to yield. After all, he was reasonable and usually very good-natured, and her very genuine surprise at his open annoyance, her amusement at the wordy article in the pretentious little newspaper, her eagerness to share the enterprise with him, and above all the very becoming morning frock she had on, all helped to soften him.

"Well," he said in a relenting tone, after she had told of the approval of the home circle, "you might have let me in before you told everyone. I guess it's as you say, a matter of chance. But a fellow's

got feelings, you know. Promise me you won't do this stunt again. Secrets between us aren't good form, I tell you. Mother will be cut up about this, I'm afraid," he added, relapsing into his former manner. "She has her code, you know."

Patricia wanted to say things she might regret, but she kept herself in hand and when the car turned toward Greycroft again, Jim's face wore its normal aspect and Patricia was smiling. She waved good-bye from the box-edged walk and ran up the portico steps with a sudden sense of joyous anticipation.

"Ju will be home by now," she thought, "and we'll open the letters. There ought to be more of them in the next mail, too. I'll have to produce my chief singers soon, and I don't know whether my scheme will work. Time will tell."

She put her hand on the door, with a little backward glance at the retreating car in the distance. "I'm *so* thankful I wasn't snippy to him," she said with an involuntary breath of relief. "He's awfully nice, after all."

And then with the despised Point Newton *Leader* in her hand she went indoors, humming the "Spring Song" of her probation days.

CHAPTER IX

JIM'S LITTLE SURPISRE

IT was Wednesday evening and the meeting in the hall at Point Newton was over.

Patricia at the end of the large auditorium was shaking hands for the second time with Maddie Finn and assuring her that the clarinet played by her friend in the check suit with the patent-leather shoes was remarkably good as far as she could judge by the small sample which had been heard at the meeting. "Of course, the leader of the orchestra will have to decide these matters," she said for the fourth time to the silent, smiling young man. "We shall have another meeting on Thursday night for the instrumental part of the society and Mr. Gufford will take charge."

She shook hands again, this time with both of them, and turned to the last lingerer,

a dark, thin girl with enormous eyes and a set, thin mouth. "Did you want to see me?" she asked, having noted the girl throughout the evening and wondered at her silence and tensity.

The girl breathed deeply. It seemed an effort to speak.

"If there might be a place in the chorus," she murmured. "I do not know if you will think I can sing. I cannot make the effort among those others—they might laugh."

Patricia's sympathy was instantly aroused. She looked more attentively at the figure before her and an impulse made her lay a friendly hand on the shabby black sleeve. "I know how you feel about it," she said. "It's horrid to have everyone staring, unless you're rather sure of yourself. What do you sing, soprano or contralto?"

The girl flushed so painfully that Patricia wondered. "I do not know. I have not sung before anyone," she answered with embarrassment. "I live alone with my deaf old aunt and I do not understand about these things. In the mill at the noon-time, they sing different parts sometimes, but I

can only listen and try to remember the tunes. Then I buy the words and I try by myself."

Patricia hesitated. "Do you think you could try here tonight?" she asked, with a glance at the group at the far end of the hall where Bruce, Elinor, Constance, Penelope, Mrs. Nat and Judith were gathered in close talk. She added quickly at the sight of the startled look on the girl's face, "No, of course you couldn't. We'll have to manage it some other way." She thought for a moment and then went on, "I'll be over here at the noon hour on Friday,—I've got to see about something here in the hall. Couldn't you run over from the mill for a minute or so? We could see how you get along. I shall be here quite alone at twelve-fifteen."

The girl promised eagerly and went swiftly out. Patricia joined the others who were now ready to leave. The girl had made a deep impression on her, and she was rather silent as she listened to the cheerful summing up by Mrs. Nat, who was saying to Bruce in her briskest tone, "Half

a dozen sopranos, a round score of altos and enough tenors and basses to manage with—I call that a mighty good prospect. Not to mention the boys who want to come in the orchestra. They may need training, but they've the ear and nature for music, since they've turned to it in spite of their surroundings."

"They'll do," replied Bruce. "Some of those fellows have more knowledge of opera than I have, and when they're properly managed, they'll make great progress. It's luck that Bartold is up here among the river colony of painters, and that he took to my invitation so decently. He knows how to train a chorus, even if he is an old fellow now."

Patricia had been greatly delighted by Bruce's ready support in the matter of the meeting and his promise of Mr. Bartold's services in training the chorus, if any chorus were to be found, had been very acceptable, since no one had been thought of in that capacity. The chorus must have more frequent meetings and more strenuous practice than the principals, who might be

supposed to be finished singers, and it was necessary to have someone on the spot to conduct the affair properly. All this she knew and was properly grateful for, but just at this moment she was thinking of the girl, and Jim's entrance gave her a chance to put the question to Mrs. Nat as one who might know anything or everything.

Mrs. Nat, however, shook her head. It was Jim who enlightened them. He came in with the pucker in his forehead that Patricia was beginning to dread—the line above the eyes that meant wounded feelings. "I ran on that Subutski girl at the door," he said to Patricia, with an eye also for Mrs. Nat. "Surely you don't intend to have such persons as that in your select company?"

"And who is the Subutski girl?" asked Mrs. Nat. "Not that timid thing who was too shy to open her mouth before the others? Surely she looks harmless enough."

Jim took Patricia's music-roll with the air of absolute possession that was habitual to him now. "She is the daughter of old Subutski, the deaf scrub-woman out on the

lots by the canal," he answered. "I happened to recognize her from having driven old nurse Anne over there this spring—she was scouring the country for house-cleaners, but the old woman proved too deaf. I saw the girl coming home from work. You're not going to accept her, are you? You won't have such rag-tags in the company, I'm positive."

Patricia did not reply. She allowed Mrs. Nat to explain that it was only a question of voice, and she walked over to Penelope, thinking rather warmly, "He doesn't really know anything about her. She isn't a daughter—she's a niece, and that proves he doesn't know anything about her."

The subject was dropped and nothing more was said about the girl. Mrs. Nat knew how to manage better than Patricia did. The slight episode laid emphasis on Patricia's interest in the girl and she thought of her often in the two days that followed. Bruce had noticed her, too, and spoke of her eyes with enthusiasm, wondering if she might sometime sit for him when he was again in the country, and Patricia readily promised to ask her.

The two days passed pleasantly enough. Bruce and Elinor, who had stayed over their time in order to attend the Wednesday meeting, left the next morning, taking the rosy Louise away from her playmate Felice, who was beginning to imitate Louise's active movements and even to frisk about in a timid, hesitating fashion. Two letters had come from some unknown source, asking for interviews with Felice's guardians and two separate couples had arrived, been found unsuitable by the Greycroft jury, and departed, leaving Felice more of the family than ever.

On the second morning just after breakfast Doris drove over in the closed car to take Felice home to Red Top with hero Martie Sneath, who had returned from her trip to town with Miss Ives to select teacher and boarding place, was with her and Martie's face was downcast. She drew Judith aside the moment they were indoors.

"Why didn't you send me word about that meeting?" she demanded. "I wanted to be there. I can play that old piano for the practice as well as anyone——"

"But you're going to study in town," interposed Judith in some surprise. "You won't be here."

Martie tossed her head in her old fashion. I'm not going in until after December, because Miss Ives thinks I'd better finish out the term with Mr. Fitch. We found a fine place that'll be vacant after Christmas and I'm to go then. I'd have plenty of time to help. Were there many at the meeting? Who's going to have the orchestra and did the scenery come yet?"

Judith explained that Jim had gotten the gardener at the Towers to see about the scenery, which was to be stowed in the Greycroft barn until later. She told of the number and enthusiasm of the Wednesday meeting in the hall, and very proudly informed her that Mr. Bartold of the artist colony was to train the chorus, and the orchestra was to be in charge of the expert Mr. Gufford, whose expenses Mrs. North had magnificently offered to pay.

"There isn't any tenor or basso yet," she said, "but who *do* you think is going to sing the other part? Mrs. Grey!"

Martie stared. "Mrs. Grey?" she echoed blankly.

"The lovely singer whose husband had died and who took Miss Pat into her house in Buenos Ayres," explained Judith, glowing. "She came up north in the summer and Miss Pat heard from her, but she didn't tell us a word. Mrs. Grey has a fine voice, though she isn't young any more, and she's coming to stay with us for a long, long time, perhaps till the first of the year, and she's going to help Miss Pat with her opera company, because she says it's a real work that she mustn't shirk."

Martie was pleased, but could not be so enthusiastic over Mrs. Grey as Judith was. She turned on her friend suddenly. "What are you going to do?" she asked unexpectedly. "Aren't you in the chorus or anything? You can sing well enough for that."

Judith crimsoned and stammered, trying not to let Martie see how dear a wish she had uncovered. Martie was not deceived, for she knew Judith by heart. "Come along," she commanded and she marched

upstairs, where Felice was being arrayed for departure. There she presented herself determinedly.

"Judith's going in the chorus, isn't she?" she asked casually in her clearest tones.

Mrs. Nat dropped the cloak she held, and Patricia started up with the shoe buttoner in her hand, and their eyes were on Judith, whose distress was overwhelming. In the same instant they grasped the truth and Patricia sprang to put an apologetic arm about her sister.

"Judy dearest, will you ever forgive us!" she cried in contrition. "Why in the world didn't you offer——"

"We've been so busy sorting out parts and properties that we missed you entirely, and that's a fact," confessed Mrs. Nat with a chuckle at herself. "Never mind, Judith, all's well that ends well, and you'll make a mighty good end lady, I'll be bound."

Judith tried to protest, but her innate truthfulness prevailed and she confessed that she'd simply love it. She'd do all she could to help with other things, too, she told them earnestly, as she took up her books for school.

Patricia watched her go off with Martie, and was opening her lips to voice her contrition again when a step was heard on the stair and Miriam came into the room with a rush.

"Have you heard the news?" she asked and then before anyone could answer, she announced, "Jim North has got an airship! I heard about it from Tom Hughes this very morning. He wrote from Hampton—that's outside of Greenville and the other side of town, you know—and he says Jim has been down there flying for ever so long. He seemed to think we all knew about it, for he asked if we weren't coming down next week for the exhibition."

She paused to enjoy the surprise she had created, and then went on: "Tom says that Jim's plane is a dandy and he's going to build a hangar on the meadow back of The Towers. Isn't it great news and hasn't old Jim kept a close mouth? Not one of us knew it, not even you, Miss Pat. That's what I call a regular knockout blow. I'm going over to the Club and catch him on the golf course and make him promise to

take me up the next one after Miss Pat."

She stooped to pat Felice's cheek and drop a kiss on the soft little hand stretched out eagerly toward her. "I'll look you up at Red Top later on, Miss," she said gayly. "I'm off for the Club now. Any messages, Patricia?"

Patricia shook her head. She was too much surprised by Miriam's news to think of anything to say to her. She was thinking, "He was very strict about secrets, but it seems he meant that only for me." Then she remembered how nice he had been about the expedition to Point Newton and relented. "Tell him we all expect an invitation to the flying," she said with a laugh. "That's the penalty for being found out."

Miriam went off, promising to make it so emphatic that there'd be no escape for Master Jim, and the three turned their attention to the packing, as Doris was in a hurry to get back to Red Top before Mr. Long left for town. Patricia and Hannah Ann watched the car out of the drive and came back into the house with a strangely lonely feeling. That small

silent creature, so frail and so dependent upon others, had left a large place unfilled.

Patricia, going about some trifling duties, found the time hang on her hands and made a sudden resolve. "I'll take the ten-fifteen to town," she told Hannah Ann. "And I'll come out on the eleven-thirty. But I'll go right on to Point Newton. Tell Judith to telephone Mr. Jim as soon as she comes in, will you, please? I've some things I really need. Miss Constance will be here for lunch. I'll meet Mr. Jim at the hall at one o'clock."

She did not telephone to Elinor when she reached town, but went straight to the studio, knowing she should find her sister at that early hour. She felt that Elinor's company was just the thing she needed at this moment. Why she was downcast, she did not stop to ask, but she felt the reaction from her previous high spirits and as of old sought her sister.

There were voices in the studio as she entered, and she caught her own name. Thinking it was Bruce and Elinor, she pushed aside the curtain and went in, saying with a tinge of petulance in her

tone, "I just had to run off and brace up with a sight of you two angels——"

But it was not Bruce. The words died on her tongue and she stood quite still.

"Randolph Landis!" she cried, and her surprise was so great she did not realize that she had called him by his first name.

He started up from the chair he had been lounging in and took her two hands in his own, while a light of great friendliness broke on his face. "You, Miss Pat!" he said in a low tone that she had never heard before.

They both came to themselves at the sound of Elinor's clear voice. Patricia pulled her hands from his and tried to appear quite calm and collected as she sat down beside her sister on the low, cushioned couch by the alcove and arranged her features into formal calling expression. But all the while, as Elinor talked and Mr. Landis responded, telling of his experiences in Russia and in Japan on the way home, she was looking at him, wondering at the pleasure she felt in his well-set head, his clear, concise sentences, his fine modesty of speech.

"Why, I like him immensely!" she thought. "He's somehow different from what he used to be. I could never fuss with him now."

And when, upon Elinor's mention of the opera-for-all project which was so much in discussion among the family at this moment, Randolph Landis showed keen interest and praised the plan with sincere words and offered his help, Patricia flung the last doubt to the winds. She knew that they were going to be friends at last.

As she stood up to go, she held out her hand and when he took it, looked straight into his eyes with her face very serious indeed. "I feel as though I hadn't really known you back there in South America and afterward," she told him earnestly. "I'm sorry I was such a perverse pig. Miss Tarleton was right in scolding me. I see that you're going to be a perfect treasure in our Point Newton work, if you're here long enough to help, and I hope you'll forgive and forget enough to come out with Bruce next week and see how things are going."

She went out after the good-byes had been said and although she had not done the shopping she had intended nor spent that hour alone with Elinor for which she had so longed, she was remarkably cheerful as she walked to the station for her train.

"He said nice things about Jim, though he doesn't know him at all," she said with a smile. "And that shows he's changed. He never used to say such nice things to me. I'm glad he's coming next week. Perhaps Jim will persuade him to stop over for the golf matches at the Club. He used to play a good game."

And smiling, she went up the car steps and took her seat on the shabby blue velvet seat of the rather battered rural train. She had almost forgotten her appointment with the dark, serious Subutski girl.

When, however, she found her waiting at the entrance to the hall, all of her interest revived and she greeted her cordially, leading the way into the empty auditorium with a pleasant sense of expectancy. Her happier mood was prophetic, for Wanda Subutski was a veritable "find." Her

voice, of which she complained as being different from the other girls' voices, had a marvelous depth and richness and a peculiar quality that thrilled Patricia to the core.

"Of course I see that you've had no training," she told the nervous Wanda, whose great eyes never left her face, "but your voice is naturally well-placed, as many European voices are—it's inheritance, I suppose. You'll need the best sort of training."

The girl looked puzzled, not knowing whether this was encouragement or criticism. "Then I can't be in the chorus," she said despondently. "I knew I had a queer way of singing. I'd have had lessons if Aunt hadn't got so deaf no one will have her to work. I do so want to sing like other girls."

Patricia made up her mind with her usual promptness. "Can you meet me in town at the Central Railway Station tomorrow night?" she asked. "I have a lesson to take and you might see how it's done. Don't fret about your voice. It

will be quite good enough for the chorus. Now, time's up and you'll have to run." And, pleased with the girl's radiant look and dashing the hour of meeting on a scrap of paper from her note-book, she hurried her new acquaintance off before she should have time to grow timid again.

As she was turning the key in the inner door, a smart, cheerful young man came into the vestibule, bowing slightly and raising his hat.

"Miss Kendall?" he inquired briskly, and when Patricia acknowledged her name went on rapidly to say that he represented the Point Newton *Leader* and would be glad to have any items regarding the new musical venture which she could give him. He took out his pad and pencil before her lips were opened to reply. "It's an organization for the working people, I believe—a sort of musical down-and-out club, to be frank, isn't it?" he asked, poising his pencil.

Patricia was horrified at this view and explained very thoroughly that the opera company was open to all, without distinc-

tion. "We want it to be just that," she said emphatically. "Opera for all. The performances are to be given here in this hall and the charge for admission will be just enough to pay for expenses—rent, light and heat and janitor service. Please don't put that part in your paper, though. Just say that we want anyone who has a voice to join with us, no matter how rich or how poor they are—mill owners will have the same chance as the bobbin girls," she ended with a little laugh.

She said good-bye and went down to the corner, where she had left word she would meet Jim. The glow of the studio hour was still with her and she greeted the sight of the familiar gray car with a gay wave of the hand.

"Now for the airship hero," she thought with an inward ripple. "Jim simply won't dare say anything against my little tame secrets after this, and I'm going to make him back-water on the Subutski girl, too."

CHAPTER X

SOME OTHER MATTERS AND FELICE

THE next three weeks passed smoothly at Rockham, and at Greycroft, in particular, the days went by without a break in their harmony.

The exhibition at the Practice Field at Hampton had made Patricia the center of a cheerfully envious group of friends, Miriam being the leader. Her declaration, "It's almost as good as owning an 'Ace' as to have a loop-the-looper like Jim for your own. He may not have been able to get into the service, but he can fly on his own hook like a bird," was echoed by Ruth Grim, Martie and others. The hangar was begun on the meadow at the Towers and Patricia had made two short flights with the triumphant Jim, whose objections to her many protegés seemed to have died a natural death with the advent of his airplane in the skies of Rockham.

Madame Tancredi had fallen in love with the voice of Wanda Subutski on first hearing and raved against the sin of keeping such a voice shut up in a mill until fortune had smiled upon Wanda and she became a pupil of the good-natured ex-*prima donna*. It happened after this fashion.

The brisk reporter, who was also part proprietor of the *Leader*, had been possessed of literary instinct sufficient to make him print Patricia's very words as to the opera company in the lengthy account he manufactured out of their interview, and the article bore much fruit. The next meeting, when chorus and orchestra were selected and separated, another brisk young man presented himself at the opening hour. He was not a reporter, but the son of the owner of the silk mill, a Mr. John Howard Jordan, who possessed a fine bass voice and an equally fine taste in music, having studied in Paris for two years before yielding to his father's wish for him to become a partner in the mill.

This Mr. John Howard Jordan, hearing of Patricia's *find*, had straightway used his

influence. Old Mrs. Subutski was given a place among the corps of cleaners in the silk mill, and Wanda was allowed to work on such piece-work as would admit of her beginning study with Tancredi, who would take not a cent for the lessons. Wanda was in the chorus and the good feeling which followed this piece of good luck to an employee bore fruit in the growing popularity of Jordan's mill, as compared with the other two manufactories in Point Newton.

Mrs. Grey had arrived from New York State, where she had been visiting relatives on her return from South America, and had speedily made herself dear to Greycroft, Judith and Hannah Ann alike being devoted to her within a week. Mrs. Nat found a friend after her own heart, while Constance, who had been at Halden's for a fortnight, was enthusiastic about her. Her experience in musical matters was as useful as her knowledge of stage effects and she helped the new society over some rather hard places. She had promised both Bruce and Elinor to stay with Patricia until the

operatic venture was on its feet and all looked forward to the days spent together with much pleasure, Penelope, in particular, being assured of success with such an able helper.

Patricia had found Alice Mannering very sweet, very agreeable, very much interested in the Point Newton venture and in the plan for providing Felice with parents, but, beyond a really kindly interest, the charming Alice had shown no activity. Judith had to confess her hopes had been very foolish, and Patricia owned to a slight disappointment, for she had treasured a wish that the gracious Miss Mannering might make one of the opera-for-all company, thus binding the varied elements together more beautifully. "But you really can't expect her to do plain, serviceable things, when she's so evidently made just to delight the eyes," she replied to Judith's disappointment. "She is kind, and that's more than most raving beauties like her are apt to be. She has a heart, even though it isn't with the slummers, as Jim so gracefully calls them."

"She's just like Mrs. North in her heart," flashed Judith unexpectedly. "She's sweet and kind in her own soft downy place, but put her among the prickly places and she'd not make so fine a figure. It's my opinion that she's been a perfect *baby!*"

Patricia exclaimed at the likening of the stately Mrs. North to an infant. She had never quite felt at home with Jim's mother and the weeks of intercourse with the Towers had not made the two into better friends. Patricia respected and admired but she could not heartily love Mrs. North. She had always at the very depths of her heart the half-expressed feeling that Alice Mannering would have been Mrs. North's real choice, if she had not been so devoted to the tastes of her only son.

Judith had found great delight in her place in the chorus of the company which was beginning the practice of "Martha" with an earnestness that delighted both the leader of the chorus and the leader of the orchestra, where Miriam Halden brought her violin and took her place with clock-like regularity rather surprising to her

friends. The tenor part was temporarily supplied for the principals by Frank Powell, an opera singer who was staying with Mr. Bartold in the artist colony on the river. A slightly strained throat had kept him from signing a contract for the opening season and he had taken a fancy to the life among the painter-people, delaying his concert work on pretense of wishing to be entirely recovered from his slight ailment.

Altogether, the prospect for the Opera-pour-tout was encouraging, and Patricia felt that things were going even better than she could have hoped. There was only one small cloud in this sky.

"Mr. Jordan says we may have some resignations from the company next week," she told Penelope as they were walking home from the Saturday afternoon "Open House" at the Country Club. "He thinks there may be a strike on. The other mill-hands at Haines' are going out, he says, and the people at Jordan's may vote to go out, too, on sympathetic strike. And that will break up the rehearsals, I suppose, for a while anyway."

Penelope looked serious. "He ought to know," she replied briefly, and then changed the subject. "Do you know, we've had that small Felice in our charge for a whole month and more, and we haven't found a place for her yet, try as we will. What are we going to do about her?"

"I don't know," returned Patricia blankly. "I suppose we'll just have to keep on trying. We're bound to find someone in time."

"Mrs. North was calling on Aunt Jinny yesterday and she spoke of a very good place at Fulton—a small, select orphanage, if there can be such a thing," said Penelope in a non-committal tone. "She's going to see if there is a place for our foundling, she says, and she knows we will be quite delighted to have Felice provided for so nicely."

"We—" began Patricia inflammably and checked herself, shutting her lips very tightly. She walked on a few steps before she spoke and then it was in a remarkably quiet voice.

"Felice is not going to any orphanage

while I have a vote," she said, pushing her hands deep in her coat pockets and holding her head high. "Mrs. Dunford's effect on those poor, dear, bad, little O'Grady twins proves that orphanages aren't good for children. When those young imps were living in that shanty on the dump-heaps with a mother dying from consumption and two very hungry little stomachs under their belts, they ran errands, carried bundles, mowed the grass or weeded gardens, earning something to keep that hungry feeling down. You know that."

Penelope agreed.

"And they were only eight years old then," went on Patricia warmly. "They're nine now and they've been in the orphanage just six months. They're the bane of the whole staff, matron, superintendent and all. They make the other children a nuisance, putting them up to all sorts of mischief, and they are getting worse and worse all the time. No, Felice shan't go to an orphanage, no matter who wants us to send her."

Penelope nodded. "I only wanted you

to know," she said. "I feel as you do. But it does seem rather hard to place her. Doris Long has done all she could, but no one wants Felice. Mrs. Nat and I have tried without success, and this morning Judith, when I spoke of Mrs. North's offer, confessed that she had written to all sorts of people, friends and strangers alike, but nothing had come of it, except those two couples that were here at the first."

"I always wondered where those people came from," laughed Patricia. "Judy certainly does things thoroughly. I'm afraid we'll have her putting up a notice at the Club asking for a set of respectable parents for a deserving child."

"There's nothing to be done, short of advertising Felice in the *Leader*," added Penelope in the same spirit, adding soberly, "There's nothing for it but to go on as we have been doing, having her spend a week at each house and joining forces on her clothes. We may as well settle down to routine, I fancy, and we'd better begin on her winter clothes after all, since there isn't any prospect of losing her soon."

The phrase struck Patricia oddly at the moment, but the vision of those cunning blue garments came to her with force and she made no comment. "We'll get Constance to bring out some samples from town," she agreed. "She's going in on Monday for some brushes and paints for those library panels for Mr. Ives, and she has such a good eye for color. She'll get the exact shade and we can get the patterns out this evening and know just how much we'll need. Ask Mrs. Nat to come over with you, won't you? She's so good at estimating. Mrs. Grey doesn't know a thing about the needle. Jim's off with the flying squadron and we'll have the whole evening to ourselves."

Penelope parted from her at the turn of the highway and Patricia went up through the lane over the orchard and down towards the house, the color still blazing in her cheeks and the determined light shining bright in her eyes. "Felice shall *not* go to any orphanage," she murmured, kicking through the brown drifted leaves on the pathway and enjoying the crisp rustle.

"She simply shall not go, no matter who says she must."

As she came down to the Shrubberies she met Hannah Ann coming in from an errand to Hilltown, and as she opened the side door Mrs. Grey appeared, heralded by the chug of Miriam's motor. The two had been over to Pittsfield on a vain search for some old china which Mrs. Grey had heard of and Miriam had volunteered to take her in search of, while Patricia and Penelope were at the Club practicing for the monthly golf-meet which was to come off the following Wednesday.

Patricia greeted the two and asked Miriam to stop for dinner, but Miriam, with an hour's practice on her conscience, refused regretfully, though she volunteered to join the circle about the Greycroft hearth later in the day.

"I'll be over to give good advice after dinner," she called back as she turned her car about neatly on the drive. "You won't be able to round up Doris this time, though, for she's gone over to New York to meet that husband of hers'. We saw

her at the station as we came past. She halted us merely in order to tell us that she'd sent your precious infant over at two o'clock according to contract. She's mighty conscientious about that young critter."

Patricia knew that Miriam's scoffing covered a deeper interest in the small Felice than even the conscientious Doris herself felt, and she said, as she linked her arm in Mrs. Grey's and turned toward the house again, "Miriam's perfectly crazy over that baby. She has taught her all sorts of games and lots of new words. She'll be all worked up over Mrs. North's proposal as to Felice when she hears it, see if she isn't. I hope no one tells her of it before she gets here tonight. I want to see her flame up."

Mrs. Grey asked what the proposal had been and Patricia, as they went into the hall, explained, adding her emphatic refusal. "Felice shan't go to an orphanage, no matter who says she shall," she reiterated. "We'll keep her here at Greycroft until she's old enough to go to school if the others get tired of her. And Judith will agree with me, I know."

The house was strangely quiet as they went into the library and no Judith was there. Neither was she in the music-room where Hannah Ann encountered Patricia in her search. "She's left word with Henry that she'll be back on the five-forty," Hannah Ann announced, pulling at the clasp of her cloak, which was obstinate. "She went off right after lunch, Henry says, and she told him she was going to the matinee." Hannah Ann sniffed, for she felt Judith too young for such private expeditions. "I was on my way to Hill-town by that time or you may be sure I'd of give her good counsel. These theater plays are all right for older folks or parties, but to run off alone to see play-actors is not what was done in my time, no indeedy!" and with a final tug, she flung off her cloak and marched upstairs.

"But, Hannah Ann, where's the baby?" Patricia called after her. "Mrs. Long says she brought her over here at two o'clock and she isn't downstairs here."

Hannah Ann halted. "I wasn't here, I tell you," she retorted sharply. "I know

she ain't with Henry, for he's in the cellar sortin' potatoes and he's been there since he washed up the dishes after her lunch. I reckon Mrs. Long didn't send the child after all."

Patricia recalled Miriam's words. "She said she *sent* Felice over," and aloud she said, "Perhaps you're right. I'll 'phone over right away."

The telephone was not answered for a long time and then the voice of the kitchen-maid, Dilly Coursey, shouted an emphatic denial to the question. "No, Feliss ain't here," she bawled. "Miss Long sent her over to your house at two and there's not a single soul in this house save myself. Feliss ain't been here since jest before two o'clock."

Mrs. Grey came out to hear the message repeated and she joined with them in a thorough search of the house and grounds, while the telephone was used to try to locate the missing baby. After an ineffectual search of the garden and shrubberies and even the surrounding orchards and fields, and after the telephone had assured

them that Felice was not with any of her guardians, the three looked at each other in dismay.

"She can't be with Judith, for she must have come after Judy left for town," faltered Patricia. "She's too big for Ju to carry anyway and the go-cart is in the back hall."

Hannah Ann burst out suddenly: "I'll tell you what it is," she cried with fierce eyes on Patricia's startled gray ones. "She's kidnaped! Those sneakin' folks who crept out to this village with her has sneaked here once again, and they've carried her off, hopin' for a reward! That is their game, I'll wager!"

She was full of this solution. "They brought her here a-purpose to take her away agin," she declared hotly. "They counted on us gettin' fond of her and they traded on her timid nice ways, the nasty sneaks!"

She was so positive and so vehement that she made an impression on both, though they did not quite agree that Felice had been kidnaped by the same persons who

had brought her to the door-step of Social House at that twilight September hour. The fear that Felice was really lost began to grow upon them and, with the memory of the newspapers' accounts of recent kidnapings Patricia turned pale.

"We must do something," she said, and hurried to the telephone again as an idea struck her.

She called up the Towers, asking for Jim, who would be dressing for his rush to town for the dinner with his flying mates. His voice was short and rather impatient until he knew who was calling and then his tone was so pleased that Patricia felt a warm wave of gratitude sweep over her. She felt she was sure of support and sympathy.

"Oh, Jim," she began and poured out her story with eager confidence in his power to help.

As he began to question and comment, her face took on a gradual change. She grew tense and her mouth tightened, as she made briefer and briefer answers. Finally she hung up and went into the

library, where Mrs. Grey was standing at the window, straining her eyes over the wide prospect in the vain hope that a small form might appear miraculously from somewhere.

"Jim says he'll notify the police if we want him to," she told Mrs. Grey in a cold voice. "Do you think we ought to do that just yet?"

She did not tell her friend that Jim's sympathy had not been stirred nor his support given. He had shown much cool philosophy. "He told me that it would all turn out for the best, and that Felice was probably safe and sound with some of her admirers and would turn up after awhile," she said to herself with burning cheeks. "He didn't even offer to stop on his way!"

Constance came in at this moment and was told the news. She looked shocked, but in her usual way she made a sensible suggestion. "Doctor Griggs is all over the village and country, why not ask him if he has seen her," she said. "He's home, for I saw him going in his drive just now."

Penelope and Mrs. Nat came in as Patricia was calling up and when the doctor, with his face grave and yet comforting, made his appearance, the group before the library fire was already buttoning its coats and pulling on gloves for a final quiet search before notifying the authorities.

"We'll hunt more thoroughly this time, Doctor," said Constance without a trace of her former animosity. "And you'll go the rounds of all the houses where she may be. Then we'll meet here, and——" she choked suddenly and turned away.

Patricia was too much agitated to feel anything just then, but afterward she recalled that the doctor had followed Constance into the hall and when the group moved out, the two were parting with a hand-clasp that promised future friendliness, and the doctor was saying, "You may rely on me, Miss Constance," in just such a tone as she had hoped Jim would use.

As they went down the portico steps Mrs. Nat clutched Patricia's arm. "Look," she cried, pointing down the road. "For the love of mercy, look!"

CHAPTER XI

A FEW CHANGES IN THE PROGRAM

THEY all stopped short at the words and stared in the direction of Mrs. Nat's pointing finger.

A small car was approaching with reckless speed, coming from the south, and in it, holding the wheel with long, capable fingers, sat Griffin of Academy days, later married and now settled in the studio apartment opposite to Bruce's place on Orton Square. Beside Griffin, as she always would be called, Judith's glowing face appeared, while squeezed tightly between the two was a small, familiar head in a fuzzy pink cap —Felice herself!

"Felice!" they chorused.

And then they rushed toward the side of the house where the driveway halted at the stepping-stone. Everyone talked at once, asking questions and making excited com-

ments while Griffin swung the small car in beside the stepping-stone and turned her broad smile full upon them. She understood what the commotion meant.

"No, your baby is not lost or kidnaped yet a while," she said to Patricia as Dr. Griggs opened the car door for her. "I've just brought out my new relative for a call—with your consent. Miss Felice, lately of Greycroft and Rockham, but now to be a regular Orton Square-ite."

Dr. Griggs handed out the smiling Felice, who was waving her hands in an effort to get to Hannah Ann, and then he stood aside while the storm of surprised questions and rapid answers subsided into something like normal conversation. He had a rather long while to wait and at last he moved off to his waiting car, stopping for a moment by Constance's side to say in a low tone, "I shall be over to see you later if I may. About nine, I think."

Baby Felice was the center of attraction as she sat on Hannah Ann's lap in the low chair by the hearth and looked quietly at all the excited faces about her, listening with

alarm to the stream of chatter and now and again putting up an exploring finger in the direction of Hannah Ann's cheek. Miriam came flying in with white cheeks five minutes after Dr. Griggs had left and she cried out rapturously at the sight of her.

"Safe and sound, and a perfect picture!" she cried. "That's what a month of Rockham has done for her, bless her. She'd have been jumping out of her darling skin if you'd have pow-wowed over her like this when she first came. Tell me all about it, for I've only had it second-hand from the angel of a Griggs, who looks as happy as though he'd found a gold mine. That man has a heart of gold!"

They told her, then, how Judith had smuggled Felice off under her own wide blue cloak, taking her down on the stage to the station and thence to the city, where she telephoned Griffin to meet her; how they had then gone to Griffin's own studio, exhibited Felice to her easy-going husband, bundled her up for the return trip and started off, making the record of their lives, as Griffin declared.

"Judith got to worrying about your missing them," she said, "but neither of us dreamed you'd be such cheerful idiots as to think the infant had got lost. You ought to have heard them when we drifted in," she told Miriam with relish, "Such a scene as they made! And such a noise! It was like the sob section of a movie-film in the making. I thought they'd all gone crazy and the doctor was giving them open-air treatment."

Then growing quite serious, she told them of her wish to take the little orphan for her own. "Judith's letter took a long while to think over," she said to Patricia and Mrs. Nat, "but I made up my mind yesterday and sent word that I wanted to see the baby. Judy is nothing if not prompt, and here we are. May I have her? Rupert is perfectly willing and she'll have a home anyway—not an orphanage——"

She got no further, for Patricia seized her hands with ardent pressure and then swept her into a warm embrace. "Have her?" she cried joyously. "Of course you may have her. I'll speak for all of them, you adorable unlooked-for parent!"

Griffin held her off after the first moment. "Is that the verdict?" she demanded, looking about the circle with keen inquiring glance. "Miss Pat knows me so well she's apt to be partial, but what do the rest say about it? She'll have a home among educated people and be taught the rudiments of life and I guess Rupert and I may be weak-minded enough to grow sort of fond of her in time."

The verdict was unanimous, and Mrs. Nat voiced the general approval as she shook Griffin heartily by the hand. "Ever since that night when we first met when I was Sinbad and you the Light of the Harem, I've known you for a sound, sensible body, and I say God bless you for the deed you are doing. The child will be well cared for, body and soul."

Griffin was touched, though she managed not to show it. She shook hands all around as an official acceptance of her responsibility towards Felice; then, with a change of front, she pulled on her gloves.

"I guess we'll have to be smashing more records on the way home, or Rupert will

think I'm lost," she said. "If you'll do up her duds, I'll be moving. I judge there aren't many of them, by the way Judy spoke."

In answer to the second chorus of surprise she assured them that, having learned from them the fear of kidnapers, she was not going to part with Felice, now that she had her in possession. She spoke lightly, but she meant every word, and, leaving the others together before the enthroned Felice, Patricia and Judith hurried up to gather the few garments and belongings together that they had so happily made for the little waif. Patricia laid the bundle containing the plaid shawl and the old clean garments in which Felice had come to them, with the card pinned firmly on top, along with the other things.

"She may never see these things herself," she told Judith in answer to her comment, "but Griffin will surely want them. They aren't any clue to Felice's past, but at least they're all she brought with her out of that past. I'll wrap them up with the other things, anyway."

It was all over so very quickly, after all, that it took Patricia's breath. Just one-half hour after Mrs. Nat's acceptance of Griffin's offer, the small car was dwindling into the distance and Hannah Ann was stalking into the house with a set mouth and with Judith following closely at her heels. Miriam went with Mrs. Nat and Penelope and Constance was left with Patricia in the darkening library, where the fire leaped and danced as usual, alternately lighting and obscuring a small article lying on the rug.

Patricia stooped to pick it up and saw that it was the mechanical ball that had been Miriam's first gift to Felice, which had fallen out of the bundle where it had been hastily put with the other toys. She stood turning it over and over in her hand. "And that's all that is left to us of Felice," she said half to Constance and half to herself. "How strange it seems that she is gone, after all our hopes and planning for it. Things happen very suddenly, don't they?"

Constance, staring absently out of the

window at Mrs. Grey walking in the garden in the crisp dusk, answered with a thrill in her voice, "Yes, very suddenly, Miss Pat. All in one moment sometimes."

Patricia in the midst of her own sensations wondered at the new tone in her voice. It sounded so deeply happy, so wonderfully content. She did not comment on Constance's devotion to their small friend, however, for the telephone tinkled and she moved off to answer it, feeling sure it must be Jim calling up to say that he was coming over after all on his way to town.

"I'll tell him that Felice is the daughter of an artist," she planned with relish. "Thanks to Judy's mania for writing letters, I can crow over him beautifully."

It was not a repentant Jim whose voice reached her ear. It was Mr. John Howard Jordan and his tone was almost hilarious. "I just had to call you up to tell you the joyful tidings," he said after his greetings were over. "The fellows had a meeting today at noon to vote on that sympathetic strike motion—I told you that agitator-

fellow was to be here, today, didn't I?—and they've voted it down. The mill goes on regular time, and your Opera-pour-tout gets a share of my thanks for that."

Patricia listened with amazement. "What has the society to do with the strike?" she asked, feeling she must have heard amiss. "They never talk business at the meetings, that I have ever heard."

A laugh came through the wire. "Not a word spoken," he agreed, "but it has helped those fellows a lot to be there singing and fiddling away with the right sort of instructors and the right sort of people to sing and fiddle with them," he replied. "I don't say the society has done the whole trick—that would be coming it rather strong—but I do believe the hands think better of their employers for the way you've handled them, and they're not so ready to listen to the fire-eaters."

Patricia told him how glad she was that the matter had been so happily settled and she hung up the receiver with a pleasant sense of success in at least one aspect of her enterprise. Nevertheless, she did not for-

get her hope regarding Jim and the sting of disappointment was quite as sharp as though it were not of her own manufacture. Although she knew that Jim must be far on his way by this time, she resented his neglect, as it now seemed to her.

She kept the sense of neglect all through the evening. Mrs. Grey was dining and spending the night at the Hermitage. Dinner with a rather absorbed Constance and entirely triumphant Judith did not lighten her heart and after dinner she went off by herself into the smaller music-room, while Judith took her books to her yellow nook above stairs and Constance wandered to the library, where she lighted the desk lamp and sat down to write letters.

Patricia sat at the piano with her hands straying over the keys, but for once the scraps of melody had no appeal. She wished for Elinor, she wished that she had not given up the great career which had been open to her, she wished for anything or everything not within her reach. And she felt very much irritated at Jim.

About nine o'clock Constance moved

lightly to the door and Patricia was surprised to see the doctor's familiar form at the door. She half rose to go through the intervening rooms to meet him, but she sat abruptly down again as she caught the radiant expression on his face as he stood looking down at Constance, who did not turn away from his look. It was exactly the sort of look that Patricia felt she herself needed at that moment.

"Jim——" she began and then stopped suddenly, staring down at her own white fingers on the keyboard.

Her eyes opened very wide and she drew a deep breath. "Why," she said aloud in a small strange voice, "I believe I really don't care whether Jim is at the dinner or not."

It was such rank heresy that at first she hesitated to believe it. After she had carefully considered the matter, she grew quite certain. She sat, playing softly for a long while after that, and then she went upstairs and wrote a long letter to Mr. James North of Wyndham Towers and taking it and the small carefully wrapped jeweler's

box with it, she went down in search of Henry to take it at once for her.

There was only Hannah Ann sitting mending a skirt by the bright lamp, and the remembrance of all the devotion and self-sacrifice of that faithful woman overcame her as she looked at the stiff figure by the sewing table. Moved by an impulse she did not analyze, she laid a hand on Hannah Ann's immaculate shoulder, as she placed the letter and packet in the circle of light on the table.

"Hannah Ann, I've broken my engagement," she said quietly. "I'm writing to him about it. Tell me that I'm not a cruel, horrid thing——"

Hannah Ann did not let her finish the sentence. She flung the mending away from her with a swift gesture and, forgetting herself entirely in the surprise of the moment, pulled Patricia down to her breast with hands that trembled, while she said, with a joyful ring in her voice, "Glory be! It's the thing I've been prayin' for. Let me look you in the eyes, child, to make sure it's true."

Patricia gave her a long steady look and then she put her head down on Hannah Ann's shoulder with a little sigh of content. She was feeling wonderfully free and light as she began to realize that she had broken the bonds which she had accepted so carelessly that night at the Hermitage. "I guess I'm not intended for a marrying person," she said. "I'd rather go on just plain Patricia Kendall forever than have to bother with being engaged."

Hannah Ann patted her very comfortingly. "You stick to that until you find the man you jest can't do without," she said wisely. "This takin' up with people merely to oblige them is no good for either party. Your Aunt Louise used to say that often enough. I'll see that letter gets to the right place first thing in the morning, and now you go and make that sister of yours put up her books. I'll bring a little tray up in a minute and I want to find you both in your robes and slippers."

It was pleasant to have matters slip back into the old groove so naturally. Patricia dropped the thought of Jim's disappoint-

ment from her mind and started obediently for the door. She stopped, however, before she had reached it. "How about Constance?" she asked. "She's in the library."

Hannah Ann waved an understanding hand. "I know," she rejoined briefly. "That's all right. Run along now and I'll be after you in a bit. My mending will keep while I fetch the tray, and I reckon I'll have time to finish it before I have to shut the house tonight."

Patricia went slowly up the stairs. She rather dreaded breaking the news to Judith, and yet she determined to tell her at once. "She's as secret as the grave, or as Hannah Ann herself," she thought. "And as my mind is entirely made up, she might as well know now and have it over with while we are alone. Tomorrow Constance or Mrs. Grey will be here, and it would be harder to make the opportunity."

She did it as best she could, but she felt she had been very abrupt and hoped that Judith might not be shocked by the suddenness of it. To her intense amazement that devoted sister merely nodded her head

and settled herself closer by Patricia's side on the cushioned divan.

"I knew you'd do it pretty soon, Miss Pat," she said thoughtfully. "You and Jim have such different tastes. I've noticed that you both were sort of fed up with being engaged."

"Judith Kendall," exclaimed Patricia, not, as Judith expected in reproof of the phrase but in eager relief. "Judith Kendall, do you mean to say that you think Jim isn't going to be awfully broken up over this? Oh, Judy, if I could only be sure of that!"

Judith silenced her with a look as Constance came into the room. "Wait and see," she whispered, and then she said to Constance, in order to hide the whisper, "Why, it's you. I thought it was Hannah Ann. I thought you had company."

Constance looked at them with a peculiar radiance in her face. "Dr. Griggs has just gone," she said softly, "and I am too wonderfully happy for words. We are engaged, he and I, and we're going to be married at New Year's."

That look on her face made Patricia surer than ever that she herself was not meant for matrimony. She knew she could never have that rapt expression nor show such feeling in speaking of any *him* as Constance showed about that nice Dr. Griggs, who was, after all, merely a clever man—not at all the miracle which Constance seemed suddenly to consider him.

After the congratulations and explanations were over and the tray had appeared with Hannah Ann's comments on the soundness of this new arrangement, and after Constance had gone to her room, Judith turned to Patricia with a slight flush on her cheek.

"I hated to tell that fib about the matinee," she said. "But I simply couldn't think of anything else in a hurry. I only got the note when I came in and I knew I had to rush if I wanted to get off while Hannah Ann and everybody was out. I sent Henry over to the Rectory with those books for the Sunday School and I wrapped Felice around with my cloak, so she hardly showed at all. I wanted to be sure no one

saw me with her. I was hoping I'd surprise you all."

Patricia kissed her and then yawned. "You surprised us, all right, but it hasn't done any harm that I can see," she responded cheerfully. "Constance might have been quarreling with the doctor yet, and——" she halted and Judith finished the sentence for her.

"And you'd still be wearing that heavenly ring," she said. Then with a searching look she asked abruptly, "Are you really, really glad that you've found out you didn't care for being engaged?"

Patricia rose, taking her by the shoulders and marching her toward the door. "If I told you how I feel you'd be shocked, I'm sure," she returned. "I'm an old maid for keeps, I believe. And the queer part is, that I feel toward Jim just as I used to before we began to censor one another's concerns. It's freedom I love, Judy-pudy, and that's a fact."

She gave her a final soft little shove and stepped back, smiling frankly over her shoulder at her sister's serious face. "Not

that I love James less, but that I love freedom more," she mis-quoted. "If your prediction about the state of Jim's feelings is true, we'll have a freedom party and you shall be the guest of honor."

Judith was satisfied and said no more. And Patricia went about her preparations for sleep with a singularly light heart. "There's always Alice Mannering in the distance," she thought. "How well she suits Mrs. North, too."

After she had put out the lights she stood looking out at the pale pure wash of moonlight on lawn and shrubbery. The branches of the trees by the house were bare save for a few clinging leaves, while beyond, the dim faint bronze of the oak grove showed fairy-like in the mystic light. Away to the south the dim lights of the great city lay like a light cloud above the treetops.

"Felice is asleep in Griffin's room," she thought. "Good old Griffin, what a heart she has, for all her scoffing. There won't be any doubt about the baby having a splendid life with those two people. Rupert is as fine in his way as Griffin is. Judy

certainly made no mistake when she wrote that letter." Turning away she added softly, "Two of my protégés gone in one day, I hope both are going to be happier for the change."

CHAPTER XII

ALL'S WELL THAT ENDS WELL

"YOU look perfectly dear in the rig," said Miriam. "It's a mercy that horrid cold has gone and your voice is all right again. Horrors, there's the signal! I must fly or Gufford will flay me alive—he's such a martinet."

Patricia sat down in the little dressing-room as Miriam, violin in hand, rushed out to take her place in the orchestra which was gathering in the narrow pit under the footlights. Mrs. Grey, already dressed and made up, was answering Judith's eager questions at the door, while Freda Holmes, who had a small part of the nurse *Buda* in the first act of the opera chosen for the first performance of the Point Newton Opera Club, was still intent before her mirror.

The room was small, but Patricia hardly

heard the whispered talk at the door as she sat playing with the gay ribbons of her Gypsy bodice. She was listening to the scraping of stringed instruments and the subdued sound of moving feet that came faintly to her from without.

"The audience is coming early," Freda Holmes said between the pins in her mouth. "Sounds like a good house."

"The place is just packed," declared Judith in answer. "I've been peeping and I believe everyone in Point Newton is here, besides our people. It's going to be better even than we hoped."

Mrs. Grey moved out into the corridor with her and Freda went on with her toilet, while Patricia still played with her ribbons, smiling to herself with absent eyes upon the flame of the small lamp on the dressing table.

It was the great night, the night for which so many had toiled and hoped and sacrificed, and the Opera-pour-tout was about to be realized. The Idea was to become a fact.

It was the second Saturday in December

and many things had happened since that October day when Felice had bidden farewell to Greycroft and Patricia had sent back the ring. Jim North and she were good friends now, although at the first he had been inclined to be very severe on persons who did not know their own minds two minutes together. Mrs. North had behaved as magnificently as usual, in spite of her evidently wounded feelings. She had not only paid for Mr. Gufford's expert services with the orchestra, but had also helped generously with the other expenses and even urged her friends to support the venture. In fact, the Opera Club had been the gainer for Patricia's decision.

Wanda Subutski had grown so rapidly in the good Tancredi's opinion that she had put her veto on her joining the chorus, after all, and Wanda's disappointment at being relegated to scales for six months' hard practice would have been pathetic had not her joy in the future promised by Tancredi over-balanced her disappointment. "Another one of your protégés provided for," Miriam had said upon hearing the

news. "You soon won't have any left if they go off at this rate, Miss Pat."

Patricia's protégés had, to tell the truth, proved wonderfully successful in finding wings for themselves after the first push she had helped to give them. Old Mr. Tomes's wheel-chair had taken him along the Fulton Road as far as his daughter's cottage and the sight of the tiny grandchild playing in the autumn garden before the door had melted his hard old heart and brought about a reconciliation which ended in his moving once again. In his infatuation with little Mary's remarkable sayings and doings he had small need for Miss Pat's songs, or indeed for her at all.

Mrs. Jim Dorsey, although still a firm admirer of Patricia, was no longer in need of those packages of tea and boxes of groceries which Patricia used to manage to smuggle in with her while she was making her calls. Mrs. Jim, on the strength of her canceled mortgage, had opened a very small shop in her front room, and the women of the village found her pins and cotton and other notions very much to their

tastes. In the month since Mrs. Jim had put up the funny little sign in her window, she had caught a glimpse of an independent future and she was very busy getting ready for it.

The Milk Fund for the Settlement House was always to be counted on; as was the work at the Crippled Home, but the greatest of all Miss Pat's protégés was just on the verge of spreading its wings tonight. The Opera Club was about to learn, by this first night's performance, whether it should emerge into the light of public life as a self-sustaining organization or whether it must still depend on the help of Miss Pat's wealthier friends. If Point Newton came out in force and pledged itself to the series of concerts and operas to be given through the winter, the Opera Club would become Point Newton's very own, with an assured future for its talents.

'Are you ready, Miss Pat?" asked Mrs. Grey, coming back into the room. "I think we may slip out and watch the first act if we're quite ready. I'm anxious to see how those two young men from the

Conservatory get on. The chorus will do this first scene well, I'm sure. They know it perfectly."

Patricia rose quickly, pulling a thin, dark cloak about her shoulders, and stepped out, leaving Freda Holmes still busy at the mirror. "The orchestra are in good form," she whispered, as they took their places behind one of the reconstructed trees from the Milano theater. "They show how they've slaved over those scores."

The opera selected for the first efforts of the new organization was the "Bohemian Girl." It had been chosen because Mr. Jordan and the two recruits from the Conservatory (loaned by the Director through the influence of Madame Milano) were familiar with the score; and since Mrs. Grey and Frank Powell had most of the operas at the tip of their tongues and Patricia could memorize rapidly, the chorus had willingly stopped the practice of "Martha" and spent its energies on Balfes' work, with such good effect that they won the approval of the strict Mr. Bartold.

Patricia peeped out through the wings

to the darkened auditorium, where, as her eyes grew accustomed to the dimness, she could pick out many faces she knew, both from Point Newton and from the neighborhood of Rockham. "There is the party from the Hermitage over at the left," she pointed to her companion, "and Mrs. North is just behind them with—yes, it's Alice Mannering and her mother and Jim. See, Elinor is getting up to let the Todds in. What a lot of Rockhamites!"

"But more local people," whispered Mrs. Grey. "The place is filled to overflowing and they're a good-looking audience. It's plain the employers are here as well as the employees. My dear, your Great Idea is going to *go!*"

Patricia's heart was full as she took one last look beyond the footlights. "It's Penelope's Idea, you know. I only set it going. Oh, there's Mrs. Nat, bless her, down there in front with Penelope now!"

Mrs. Grey touched her gently. "Hark, there's the signal," she said, and as she spoke the curtain rose slowly and the opening chorus began. "Up with the banner,"

and it was sung with a dash that made Mrs. Grey nod her head. Count Arnheim and Florestein—Mr. Jordan and Fleming from the Conservatory—came on in fine shape, with the Count's solo and chorus of retainers making a good impression.

As the applause died out and Freda, in the rôle of *Buda*, drew *Arline*, who in the first act is a small child and who was Cissy O'Brien in real life, closer to her father, the Count, who stooped to take her in his arms for the second song, Mrs. Grey ran an experienced eye over the interested audience.

"Your Ugly Duckling is turning out a swan after all," she said. "I believe Point Newton is with you to the core."

Patricia glowed, but she would not be too sanguine. "Wait till it's all over and the subscription lists are made up," she returned "They may applaud and yet not open their purses. Wait and see."

She felt, however, that Mrs. Grey's words were true. All through that first act, watching from the wings, and when in the second act she rose from her sleep to sing

the well-known Gypsy Girl's Dream the enthusiasm which greeted each musical number assured her; and as the last notes of the final Gypsy chorus ended amid a perfect hurricane of applause, she turned to Frank Powell, whose *Thaddeus* had won rounds of wild clapping and "Bravos" from the Italian part of the audience.

"It's a success, isn't it?" she said breathlessly.

"*Ab*solutely," he returned. "We've got them under our thumbs."

The curtain was rung up, and he seized Patricia's hand while Mrs. Grey, who as the Queen had died of pistol shot, came back to life in the line of smiling and bowing principals, while the chorus, being loudly demanded by its relatives and friends, crowded into the available spaces behind the chief singers and bowed and smiled like a row of Chinese mandarins, while the people in front clapped and *encored* and *bravoed* in the maddest fashion. It was the pinnacle of success, the summit which they had hardly dared to hope to gain.

In the midst of it all, someone pushed

Bruce out among them, whispering, "Now's the time! Don't wait till they've cooled down."

And Bruce, who had been scheduled to make his appeal to the pockets after the curtain had fallen, moved out to the front of the stage, over to one side where his flexible figure and agreeable features showed out clearly against the dull folds of the outer curtain.

He made a gesture with his hand toward the row of singers with their beaming background of chorus, and the applause died sufficiently for him to be heard.

"I'm not going to obstruct your view of the stars and their satellites, you see," he said in his pleasant voice, speaking very distinctly so that all might hear. "I'm only going to say a few practical words."

Jim North cried: "Go on. We're ready," and there was a general laugh which put the company in still better humor.

Bruce went on: "You have heard the Point Newton Opera Company for the first time tonight. Whether you hear it often or only once in a while depends entirely on

yourselves. We have on the table behind the scenes a pack of green tickets, which are pledges to be signed by all who wish to keep the music going. If enough of those green tickets are signed tonight, the Opera Company will be a regular organization of Point Newton. These talented people," with another wave of his hand toward the singers, "have agreed to produce one new opera every month, with concerts of operatic selections every week here in this hall if you want them enough to buy tickets to cover expenses. That's all they ask, they give their services free——"

"Sure, we want 'em!" shouted a voice from the distant gallery corner behind the spot-light apparatus.

"What'll they do if we don't subscribe?" asked a man on the front row. He had a large shiny watch chain with huge lodge seals dangling, and he put his hand in his trousers pocket as he spoke.

Bruce answered him with a laugh. "Oh, they'll go on giving a monthly opera here, but they'll come over to Rockham and Hilltown for their other performances. They won't force themselves upon you."

There was a murmur and rustle among all the Point Newtonites at that, and Mr. Edward Jordan of the Columbia Silk Mills spoke out resolutely, in his strong, firm voice.

"Bring those green tickets out, if you please, and let the orchestra leader deliver them to me. I'm going to begin the ball and whatever is left over, the other fellows may take. My hands can have their share of my green tickets, if they like, or they can spend their own cash, if they prefer, but I'm going to keep those other towns from getting ahead of Point Newton in this deal."

That was the end of formality. The curtain stayed up and the singers went down among the audience, which moved to meet them. Green tickets circulated everywhere, and the names that were signed to them were not only those of mill owners and prosperous merchants—the signatures of mill hands, factory bosses and small shop-keepers appeared among the rest. Point Newton's civic spirit was up and it was not to be trifled with.

Bruce Haydon, shaking hands with the elder Jordan while the rush was still going on, said heartily, "You beat me as a speaker. That was a good idea of yours, springing that 'Point Newton forever' on them. It roused them up mightily."

Mr. Jordan stared and then laughed. "Bless you, I didn't do that for effect," he returned with convincing candor. "I just spoke right out from the heart. I'm not going to see Point Newton beaten in any game, particularly a game that means as much to it as this one does."

In a few minutes the little green cardboard squares had given out and people were writing their names on scraps of programs or anything else that might serve. The other mill owners had taken example by Mr. Jordan's generosity and while they did not go as far as he had, still made decided inroads on the first stacks of green cards, leaving small opportunity for the other Point Newtonites, who were equally determined to have a share in the new enterprise and who took to informal methods of signature.

Miriam came to Patricia as she was hurrying to the dressing-room to change her dress and halted her on the stairs by the stage.

"Mrs. Grey wants you to keep on your Arline duds," she told her hastily. "Tancredi is here, over in the corner behind the pillar, and she suggested that the people would like it if all you song-birds kept your feathers on till after the whole thing's over. The chorus are crazy to and the others don't mind, so you'll have to fall in line, though I know you hate it."

Patricia did hate it, for she made it a habit never to make capital of her professional make-up and had a rather poor opinion of actors and singers who liked to display themselves in their stage clothes, but she had to give in this time. "All right," she replied, and she turned back with Miriam to the crowded floor of the hall, where the seats were now being removed and placed against the walls to make place for the social part of the program.

Mrs. Nat and Penelope came up as she halted to allow a long bench to pass and

Penelope's blue eyes were shining with a peculiarly brilliant light.

"It's wonderful, perfectly wonderful, how it has all come out," she said in a breathless sort of way. "And to think that when we met in Aunt Jinny's garden I thought you a rather light-minded person. Oh, Miss Pat, I want to tell you how much I marvel at the way those trifling words of mine have been transformed by your unselfish——"

Patricia broke in hastily. She did not relish such lavish praise, particularly when she did not feel that she deserved it.

"That's all right," she interposed. "The Opera-for-all Idea has taken hold good and strong here in Point Newton, that's certain. And we've all had a hand in it. You produced the Idea, I hissed the others onto it and they did the rest. Mrs. Nat, aren't you going to come along with me to the North sector? I've just heard from Mrs. Mannering that Alice and Jim are engaged and I want to rush over with congratulations. Elinor is signaling from the other side and we'll have to be swift."

Mrs. Nat chuckled her deep husky chuckle as she turned to make her way beside Patricia, but she made no comment on the news. Instead she said cheerfully, "Griffin and her nice Rupert were here, but they had to leave when the singing was over. They're still afraid someone might walk off with Felice when they're away."

Another bench halted them and Miriam again hurried up. "They're going to clear the floor and have a dance," she told them. "I'm off for my fiddle; tell Bert Nelson if you run across him."

Mrs. Nat looked after her with kindly eyes. "That girl hasn't changed a scrap since those old Patrick Hennery days," she said. "All harum-scarum on the outside, but pure gold in the heart of her. She's going to scrape away for another hour or two, that these Point Newtonites may dance. Well, that's the sort of pampered aristocrat that the angels love, I reckon. Come, Miss Pat, Mrs. North is getting ready to leave, we'll have to be quick if we want to wish them all joy."

After the North's had gracefully accepted

all the nice things to be said and had made their way among the dancers to the door, Patricia laid a hand on Bruce's arm as he came to claim the first dance. "Do you know, Bruce," she said with a joyful squeeze of his black sleeve, "I've found out what makes this opera idea such a howling success here in Point Newton. It isn't the money we've spent nor the fine talent we've had the luck to have offered—it's because we've all put our hearts into it. We've been so terribly infatuated with it, you know."

Bruce nodded in his comfortable, understanding way. "Sure thing," he returned easily. "It's love that makes the world go 'round, Miss Patsie darling." And then he added more soberly, "And you can't fool these workers into taking your condescension or your vanity or your whim in exchange for that true metal. That's where the secret lies."

These were serious words for such a gay scene, but they fitted into Patricia's mind rather happily. She glanced at Miriam in the orchestra pit, wielding her bow with a

good grace; she caught a glimpse of Mrs. Grey, in her queen's attire whirling in the arms of a short, awkward boy; she saw Elinor chatting with Wanda Subutski and her proudly smiling aunt; she had brief views of Mrs. Nat, Doris, Mrs. Halden and other of her friends and she felt that Bruce's words applied to each and every one.

"It's awfully jolly to have such ducks of people to work with," she said with much enthusiasm as she joined Judith and Martie in the group by the stage stair. "I'm having a gorgeous time tonight, and I'd like to hand a vote of thanks to the Point Newton Opera Club."

Judith drew her aside. She was tremendously proud of her sister and she wanted to be the first to tell her the news. "Miss Pat, they're going to give you a tremendous big basket of flowers after the dancing is done, and Mr. Powell is going to make a speech. I thought you'd like to be ready——"

Patricia laughed as she interrupted Judith's precise sentences.

"I'll find him and tell him to give it to

Penelope Home. She's the real originator of the Great Idea," she declared gaily. "I've got to go over and dance with every one of the chorus now, and I shan't have breath enough left to say 'thank you.'"

Judith watched her with loving eyes as she threaded her way among the throng upon the dancing floor, with her bright head held high and her pink lips parted in a friendly smile at the whole world.

"Martie Sneath," she said solemnly as she turned to her friend, "Miss Pat is the luckiest person I know. Everything she does turns out well. She has made this Opera Club out of almost nothing, and every one of her protégés has had good fortune, too. She's wonderfully lucky, I say."

Martie glanced after Patricia's bright figure. "Luck?" she echoed. "Luck? I don't call it luck. I call it—well, I call it grit and a mighty kind sweet heart for other people's needs," she ended unexpectedly.

And she added with a laugh, "I've been one of her protégés and I ought to know!"

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